Pro Wrestling TORCH

NWA WORLD CHAMPION: STING

SUMMER ANNUAL III 1990

EDITOR/PUBLISHER: WADE KELLER

Pro Wrestling TORCH ANNUAL III

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INTRODUCTION

BY WADE KELLER

Welcome to the Pro Wrestling Torch Summer ANNUAL III 1990. This year's Annual is the biggest book I have done. At over seventy pages, it is over twenty pages larger than last year's Summer Annual II. There are several main sections in this book, the main one being the first ever "Torch Talk Collection: The Announcers."

The book is kicked off with a "Mid-Year Section" featuring a brief look at some of the top stories in the first six months of 1990 and my mid-year picks for leading award contenders.

Another main section is the "Nostalgia Features." The decade of the 1970's, in many ways, does not receive the coverage that the eighties and sixties seem to receive. In this special section, Torch Weekly columnists Bill Kunkel, Jeff Steele, Mick Karch , and Mr. Mike look back at the 70's, while also touching on the 60's and 80's. The features are accented with illustrations and photos.

A few "Torch Features" follow, including a solid page of Bill Kunkel's great "Potshots" cartoons. Then, in the tradition of Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly, a special "Torch Talk" interview follows with Eddie Gilbert entitled "My Side." Eddie Gilbert compares himself to Warren Beatty in that for years people have been talking about him and he has kept quiet. In this interview, Eddie discusses his recently severed eighteen month stint with the NWA and the turbulence he faced throughout. Torch Weekly columnist Ray Whebbe follows with a "Ring Rumblings" commentary on the state of pro wrestling today.

As always, the TorchReaders came through with flying colors, as the "Reader Feature" section includes your "Late Night Unofficial Top Ten Lists," "Most Memorable Moments," "Preaching to Promoters," and "Booking Ideas." Hidden in there is a special from Torch Weekly's video tape reviewer Steve Gerber with a unique "What's Out There" column.

Two guest features follow, starting with "Coming Attractions" by frequent Wrestling World magazine contributor, Ernie Santilli, who has an exclusive fictional list of movies soon to be released starring wrestlers. It could be referred to as "What's Way Out There." Then, co-editor of Wrestling Perspective newsletter, Paul J. MacArthur, writes a serious article on steroids entitled "Put This In Your Arm and We Will Make You A Star."

A few additional humorous pieces follow, including "Dear Mick," the fourth in a series of "SNR Letterbag Rejects," one of the most popular ANNUAL features. On the same page, two comics by Bill Kunkel on Jim Ross are featured, followed on the next page, a mini-strip, "Grumpy Old Man: Ole Anderson" based on Dana Carvey's "Grumpy Old Man" character on this season's "Saturday Night Live" episodes.

The ANNUAL is concluded with a feature that exceeded all expectations, "Torch Talk Collection: The Announcers." Nine pro wrestling announcers responded to Torch's invitations to participate in this feature, including announcers with backgrounds in the WWF, NWA, USWA, AWA, IWA, LPWA, and other territories. There were other announcers I was unable to contact, but interviews with them may run in future Torch newsletters and books.

Literally hundreds of hours were spent by me on planning, researching, typing, interviewing, writing, and layout. I even flew to Baltimore to take the photo you see on the cover. A similar amount of time was spent by the contributors to which a lot of credit goes for making these seventy pages as valuable as they are.

It is with great anticipation that I await your response to this book. Although I enjoyed putting this together, the real payoff comes with your letters telling me what you liked and frankly what you did not like about the ANNUAL III. I hope you find this book worth sharing with fellow wrestling fans who may be interested in purchasing their own copy or simply browsing through yours.

If you are not a regular subscriber to Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly, I can only ask that you try a sample subscription of four issues for $5.00 and join the growing list of fans from five continents and virtually every state who read Torch every week. I am confident after seeing the newsletter you will be hooked for as long as you are a wrestling fan. The newsletter features interviews, illustrations, popular columnists, color photos, editorials, reader letters, free classifieds, video tape reviews, match reports, and most importantly, that week's headline news stories. I would love for you to be a regular reader for our upcoming third anniversary in October.

Read on and enjoy the seventy pages of features previewed here. I will talk to ya' in the next newsletter!

Wade Keller,

Wade

Editor

Pro Wrestling Torch Summer ANNUAL III 1990 is published by Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly newsletter and Wade Keller. The price for the ANNUAL is $10.00 per copy North America and $12.00 overseas. Subscriptions to Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly are available at $5.00 per four weekly issues up to $100.00 per 80 issues. Cost via subscriptions overseas is $8.00 per four issues up to $160.00 per 80 issues. A bonus color photo is included with each issue. All photos, except where specifically noted, are by Wade Keller.

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MID-YEAR ABC's

BY WADE KELLER

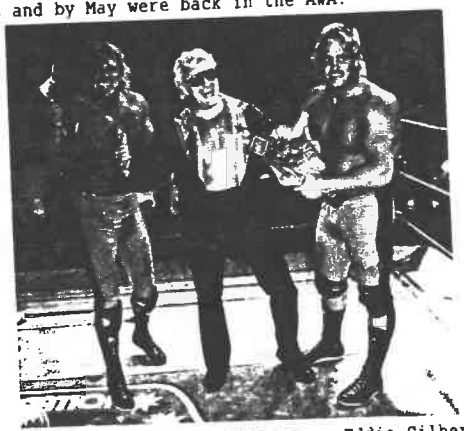
The first six months of the 1990's have proven to be more eventful than most could have imagined. With three World Titles changing hands, The Road Warriors, Kerry Von Erich, and Genichiro Tenru changing affiliations, and Ric Flair threatening to do so, this has been a turbulent six months. But, in reality, it is as easy as A-B-C...

A... A is for Andre the Giant who at least temporarily retired from active competition in wrestling. April 1st at Wrestlemania Andre entered a match teaming with Haku with manager Bobby Heenan. After Haku was pinned by Demolition, Heenan and Haku blamed Andre for the loss. Andre cleared the ring of the heels and left the arena to the cheers of the fans. He has since teamed with Giant Baba on a WWF/ All-Japan/New-Japan special card in Japan. Andre's shoes were quickly filled by the NWA's latest find, El Gigante.

B... B is for Brutus Beefcake who was tragically injured in a parasailing accident. Beefcake was rammed in the face by a woman parasailing. His entire skull was fractured He may not return to wrestling ever, but the most optimistic estimates say he will be out of action at least eighteen months. Beefcake was scheduled to battle Curt Hennig at Summerslam for the Intercontinental Title. Beefcake was replaced by the "Texas Tornado" Kerry Von Erich.

C... C is for Comeback, which is something the AWA attempted to do this year and failed. April 8 they returned to the St. Paul Civic Center with Larry Zbyszko defeating Masa Saito for the AWA Title in front of only 2000 fans. May 5 was their second attempt, this time with help from the NWA who loaned them Ric Flair versus Brian Pillman. The event drew around 3500, still not impressive. Several factors led to severance of the working relationship that never had a chance to mature. The AWA cancelled their June and July dates and no return date was set at mid-year.

D... D is for Destruction Crew who donned masks in the NWA and wrestled as "Minnesota Wrecking Crew" in the NWA while still wrestling in the AWA as tag team champions. When Arn Anderson was injured in the midst of an Andersons versus Steiners feud, Ole brought in the Crew to take over. The Crew did not fare well in their feud against The Steiners and by May were back in the AWA.



E... E is for Eddie Gilbert. Eddie Gilbert created waves in June as he sought coverage in Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly and Matwatch newsletters concerning his desire to be let out of his NWA contract. Because of an injury to his shoulder, he was unable to wrestle. The NWA contracts guarantee pay, even if a wrestler is inactive with an injury. After many in the NWA pointed their finger at Gilbert accusing him of taking unfair advantage of that clause and blaming his divorce with Missy Hyatt as another reason for sitting out, he sought severance of the contract. July 3, Gilbert and Herd agreed to put an early end to his contract. July 7 Gilbert showed up on WMC-TV in Memphis for the USWA and created havoc as a heel.

F... F is for Foreign Objects, which thanks to Ted Turner were entirely eliminated from the NWA. For years promoters have been trying to eliminate the dreaded foreign objects from interfering with fair matches. Turner simply and brilliantly banned the word "foreign" from all NWA broadcasts. Unfortunately, "foreign" objects were mysteriously replaced with a new breed of illegal weapons - the now feared, "International Objects."

G... G is for Gone, which is what the NWA says when fans ask what happened to The Road Warriors. The Warriors made their long-awaited jump to the WWF after being released from their contract in the NWA early. They showed up in the WWF as The Legion of Doom and immediately began a verbal feud with the newly turned heels, Demolition. The LOD are slated to team with Ultimate Warrior against all three Demolition in the fall.

H... H is for Hulk Hogan who threatened to retire from wrestling this year just a month after losing the WWF Title to Ultimate Warrior at Wrestlemania after being "injured" by Earthquake. Hogan also signed with New Line Cinema to take part in a series of movies. His full-time wrestling career may be history.

I... I is for the International Wrestling Association which gained notoriety upon signing a contract with SportsChannel America. SportsChannel and the IWA signed a two year deal to run the IWA wrestling shows three times a week. The IWA did not receive rave reviews for their first few weeks of TV product, but nonetheless, Rob Russen's IWA is a way for independent wrestlers to get national exposure.

J... J is for Junkyard Dog who after missing scheduled dates for virtually every promotion in America in a one year period, including the NWA and AWA, was re-signed by the NWA and given an immediate push to main events. JYD was brought in as a "big surprise" to scare booker Ole Anderson and Ric Flair. JYD actually pinned Flair in several cities in non-title matches before the feud culminated at the Clash of Champions XI TBS special June 15. The not-so-classic match ended when the Horsemen jumped in the ring and interfered on behalf of Flair. JYD's act was toned down by July.

K... K is for King Harley Race, who made his return to a national promotion on the NWA's "Great American Bash" where he pinned Tommy Rich. That match was a rematch from their World Title matches of almost a decade ago where Tommy Rich won and lost the NWA World Title to and from Race. The finish to the Bash match was a surprise as Race was just in for two dates, while Rich was getting a push in the NWA.

L... L is for Lost Chances for Lex Luger, who appeared to be on the verge of winning the NWA World Title from Ric Flair on two pay-per-view events. At Wrestlewar February 25 Lex Luger had Ric Flair apparently ready to submit to his "torture rack" when the Horsemen came to ringside. Sting, who was injured but originally scheduled for this title match against Flair, was at ringside. The Horseman attacked Sting who was on crutches. Luger made the choice between saving Sting and continuing to force Flair to submit when he dropped Flair and attacked the Horsemen. At the second event, Capital Combat, Luger's World Title shot was stopped when the Horsemen lifted the cage and attacked Luger. Lex continued to hold the United States Title through the mid-year but was unable to win the NWA Title.

M... M is for Money and Mulligan, Blackjack that is. Blackjack Mulligan and his son Kendall Windham were each sentenced to about two years in prison on charges of selling counterfeit money. Following the conviction came many jokes about twenty dollar bills and the Windham family.

N... N is for No more National Wrestling Alliance, a name which is slowly disappearing from the Ted Turner owned wrestling organization. Due to the fact that the NWA by

nature is a more confining name than WORLD Wrestling Federation and Turner does not own the exclusive rights to NWA name, a movement toward "World Championship Wrestling" has been made. WCW will be tough for many NWA fans to get used to.

O... O is for Ole Anderson, the latest in a string of NWA bookers and booking committees. Ole was bashed at the beginning of his tenure as booker for promoting a racially oriented feud between Junkyard Dog and Ric Flair. After that angle was history, the NWA began to take direction, Sting won the NWA Title and Ole became more accepted. There is still hesitation to put Ole in the same category as Bill Watts, mainly because Ole's TV is nowhere near Watt's excitement level. Ole, though, could end up being a successful booker.

P... P is for Perfect Victory, something Mr. Perfect Curt Hennig gained over Tito Santana in the finals of the Intercontinental Title Tournament. Many fans were confused upon hearing that the semifinals of that tournament were not until the following day. Boy, it's a good thing Hennig and Santana were victorious the next night or there would have been problems. Hennig continued to be one of the best workers in the business as Champion.

Q... Q is for Quake, Earthquake, that is. Known previously as John Tenta, Earthquake became one of the most hated men in this country after sitting on Hulk Hogan a few times on a Brother Love Show. Hogan threatened retirement after being crushed by Earthquake. Of course, Hogan announced that he indeed will not retire and will battle Earthquake at August's Summerslam.

R... R is for Riger, Jushin Riger that is, who continued to amaze viewers with his matches. His series against Naoki Sano were some of the greatest matches since The Dynamite Kid-Tiger Mask series in the early eighties.

S... S is for Sting. After over two years of matches with Ric Flair, Sting finally defeated Flair for the NWA World Title July 7 at the Baltimore "Great American Bash." Sting was to be the centerpiece of the NWA with Flair finally stepping down from the perineal champion position.

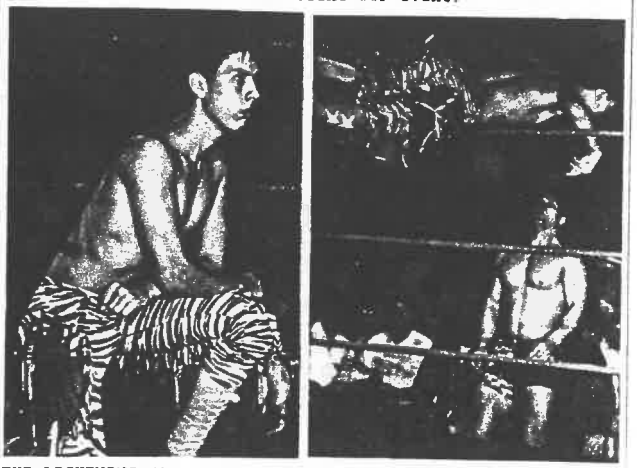
T... T is for Turbulence by Tenryu who changed the future of pro wrestling in Japan by jumping from All-Japan to a new Super World Sports promotion owned by Megame-Super. Genichiro Tenryu was the star of All-Japan and his departure moved All-Japan down one more notch in prestige and immediately made SWS a force in Japan. Mitsuhara Misawa, Toshiaki Kawada, and Kenta Kobashi were thrust into higher positions in Baba's All-Japan promotion to make up for the loss of Tenryu. The full effects of his jump have not even begun to be felt.

U... U is for Ultimate Warrior, who was the first of the former Blade Runner team, the other being Sting, to win a World Title this year. Warrior defeated Hulk Hogan at Skydome in Toronto at Wrestlemania VI on April 1. Hogan missed a legdrop and one splash later Ultimate Warrior was champion. Unfortunately for Warrior, Hogan remained as popular as ever and remained the true number one man in the WWF. Mixed reactions were norm for Warrior the first six months of 1990. The Ultimate Warrior may or may not be the future of the WWF.

V... V is for Viewers Choice Victory. Early in the year, the WWF attempted to break away from the middle man in the cable pay-per-view industry by not working with Viewers Choice and Request TV. Vince McMahon failed in his attempts and after the new contract was signed with the cable companies, McMahon was worse than he started. WWF pay-per-view events continue to be distributed through the middlemen such as Viewer's Choice.

W... W is for Weekly, which has been the new Pro Wrestling Torch schedule since May. Before, PWT was a bi-weekly publication. The new weekly scheduled and format have received a majority of positive reviews. Torch Weekly, with the kind of unprecedented support it received this year, should be around for years to come.

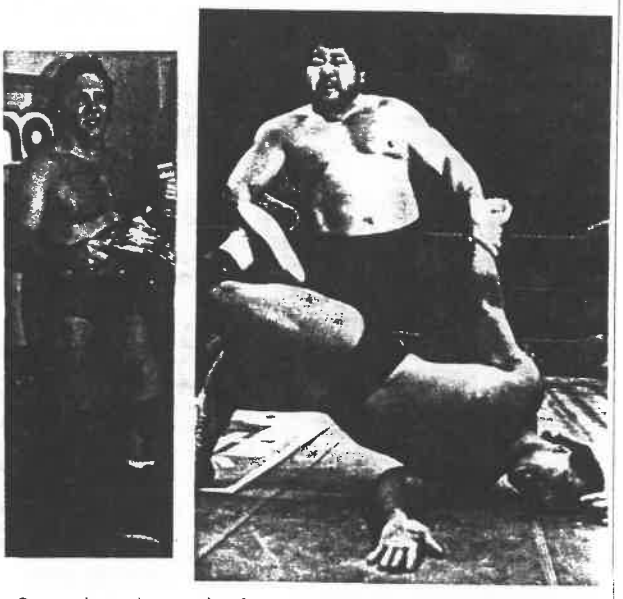
X... X is for xenophobia, an attitude no longer apparent in Nikolai Volkoff. Volkoff broke up with fellow Bolshevik partner, Boris Zhukov, and stopped bashing all non-Soviet ways. In fact, Volkoff began singing the Star Spangled Banner at the beginning of his matches. Volkoff, now billed from Lithuania, received a special award from the Boy Scouts of America at a recent WWF event.



THE LIGHTNING KID / KID FLIES OVER TOP ROPE ONTO RICKY RICE

Y... Y is for Young, which is what The Lightning Kid of the Minneapolis-based PWA is. Still in his teens, The Lightning Kid broke into wrestling. With amateur wrestling and martial arts behind him, he flew in and out of PWA rings showing many across the country that he is a future star of Japan and the United States.

Z... Z is for Zbyszko, who lost his AWA World Title the same night that Mike Tyson lost his Heavyweight Boxing Titles to Buster Douglas. February 10 in front of over 63,000 fans in Tokyo, Masa Saito defeated Zbyszko. Zbyszko regained the title April 8 in St. Paul, MN. The first six months of 1990 saw all three traditional World Titles change hands, an extremely rare occurrence.



Tune in six months from now for the Pro Wrestling Torch Yearbook 1990, the winter edition, for a recap of the next six months... ***

PART 1: THE FIRST TORCH QUOTEBOOK (10/87)

TED DIBIASE to Mean Gene: "If I wanted your opinion, I'd buy it."

PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY on his Original Midnight Express: "I now introduce the only pair in Las Vegas that can beat a full house, The Midnight Express."

ROAD WARRIOR HAWK: "Remember, we're the guys who snack on danger and dine on death."

BOBBY HEENAN concerning Elizabeth: "Elizabeth is pretty in a gaudy way."

KELLER'S MID-YEAR PICKS

The following are your humble editor's opinions on who are the leading contenders for the third annual Torch 1990 Year-End Awards...

WRESTLER OF THE MID-YEAR (North America): This is very difficult in that the champions on this continent are no longer great wrestlers, such as Ric Flair and Randy Savage, nor are they legends, such as Hulk Hogan. But one man stands above all the rest in that he has been in consistently good to great matches, he is carrying them, and he won a major championship. Mr. Perfect Curt Hennig is leading the race for wrestler of the year. His series against Hogan produced some of the greatest matches of Hogan's career. Hennig's cut-short series - no pun intended - with Brutus Beefcake was also producing the best matches in the country at the time. His bumps are phenomenal and his interviews and persona cannot be topped in this country.

Second place goes to Ric Flair for having to suffer through a series of matches with Junkyard Dog, while having good to great matches with Sting and Lex Luger all year. Honorable mention goes to Lex Luger, Randy Savage, Sting, Rick Rude, and Ultimate Warrior.

TAG TEAM OF THE MID-YEAR: For a team that was being pushed out of the promotion twice within the last year, The Midnight Express have proven their worth. Their matches against The Rock & Roll Express and The Southern Boys were the best this year has seen in tag team wrestling. The fans continue to respond to them, proving they are still a worthy act.

A close second place goes to The Steiner Brothers. These brothers do some of the most innovative, amazing moves ever seen on this continent. Their matches against Doom were great while the Freebirds matches were not bad either. Scott is the future superstar of some promotion and is just beginning to shine. Their interviews need a lot of work, but any tag team that gives a promotion enough confidence to let The Road Warriors leave deserves acclaim.

Honorable mention to Demolition, Doom (who could surprise people by winning this at year's end), The Rockers, The Rock & Roll Express, and The Hart Foundation.

ROOKIE OF THE MID-YEAR: The toughest part of the year is figuring out who is eligible for rookie honors and what the criteria should be. "Stunning" Steve Austin out of World Class who mainly feuded with "former mentor" Chris Adams shows the most potential of any rookie this year.

Honorable mention to Mark Callous and Jerry Lynn.

PROMOTION OF THE MID-YEAR: Thus far, there is no front-runner. Neither the WWF nor NWA have had banner years as both seem to be going through a transition period. Portland Wrestling continues to provide the most steady weekly action of any independent. The NWA by a hair is leading the pack.

MATCH OF THE MID-YEAR: This year really tests which has the greater influence in votes, quality of the match or the importance of the match. The Midnight Express-Southern Boys match from the Bash gets number one for its near perfection. There were new moves displayed, many false finishes, martial arts square offs, flying moves, out of ring action, great work by Cornette at ringside, and overall fan interest.

Second has to go to Hulk Hogan versus Ultimate Warrior for the sheer emotion involved. The finish surprised ninty-nine percent of the viewers. The amount and quality of the wrestling will keep this match from getting first, but the drama may never be beaten.

Honorable mention: Sting-Flair at Starrcade; Sting-Flair at Bash; Harts-Rockers on SNME; Midnight-R&R at Wrestlewar; and Ricky Rice-Jerry Lynn 45 minute draw from George's is up there as far as nonstop action and fan intensity goes.

MANAGER OF THE MID-YEAR: Bobby Heenan gets first as his effectiveness as a trainer in pushing Rick Rude as a title contender was solid and it was a new angle for him. His interviews and his antics on Prime Time continue to be entertaining.

Honorable mention: Jim Cornette, Paul E. Dangerously, Ronnie P. Gossett.

ANNOUNCER OF THE MID-YEAR: Jim Ross continues to be the best this business has to offer. His faults are not enough to drag him lower than the nearest competition. He continues to bring a realism to virtually every match he calls.

Honorable Mention: Lance Russell, Vince McMahon, Tony Schiavone, Chris Cruise, Mick Karch, and Lee Marshall.

COLOR COMMENTATOR OF THE MID-YEAR: Not much competition for Jesse Ventura this year. The threats of him leaving the Fed make him all the more appreciated while he is here.

Honorable Mention: Bobby Heenan continues to know his role very well on Challenge. Terrance Garvin was fabulous at the beginning of the year with Marc Lowrance in the USWA. Jim Cornette was entertaining on WCW.

FEUD OF THE MID-YEAR: Ric Flair versus Sting was heated up with Sting's legitimate injury. The Horsemen shoving Sting out of the organization is one of the more memorable moments this year. The feud started at Starrcade when Sting pinned Flair, then at the first Clash of the year when they turned on him, then at Wrestlewar when they attacked him while he was on crutches, then the rest of the time when Sting did run-in saves, culminating at the Bash when Sting pinned Flair to win the World Title.

Honorable Mention: Hogan-Warrior, Rude-Warrior, Luger-Flair, Steiners-Doom, and Demolition-Harts.

BEST NEW GIMMICK OF THE MID-YEAR: Earthquake, Third Demolition Member Smash, and Nikolai Volkoff singing US Anthem are the only three that come to mind as being new. By the end of the year there will be a better perspective on this category.

BEST ANGLE OF THE MID-YEAR: The Horsemen turning on Sting was a hot angle and deserves first. The Rockers-Harts-Demolition altercation on SNME still stands out in my mind. Earthquake splashing Hogan was effective though pretty ordinary.

ANNOUNCING PAIR OF THE MID-YEAR: Vince McMahon and Jesse Ventura continue to have the best chemistry and consistency of any pair. Honorable mention: Ross & Cornette, Monsoon & Heenan, Cruise & Funk, and Karch & Dallas Page.

MOST IMPROVED WRESTLER OF THE MID-YEAR: No one stands out, but Ron Simmons, Curt Hennig, Randy Savage, Brian Pillman, and Tommy Rich come to mind.

OUTSTANDING WRESTLER OF THE MID-YEAR: For pure wrestling excellence, Bobby Eaton, Scott Steiner, and Curt Hennig have been great. Shawn Michael, Rick Steiner, Bret Hart, Ricky Morton, and Tracy Smothers have been very good.

BEST WEEKLY TV SHOW OF THE MID-YEAR: USWA Challenge, although growing stale lately, has told a good and consistent story. The Adams-Austin, Kerry-Borne, and Dundee-Tatum matches have all been good. Marc Lowrance and Terrance Garvin were great. Craig Johnson seems to fit right into the corniness of the Tatum-Tessa-Dundee and Adams-Wife-Ex-Wife-Austin feuds and the Percy Pringle turn. The background information now given at the beginning of the show making the main event seem worthwhile should be examined by other TV-oriented promotions.

Honorable Mention: WWF Superstars, NWA WCW, and Portland.

BEST MAJOR EVENT OF THE MID-YEAR: The Great American Bash was the best this year had to offer. There was a passing of the torch from Flair to Sting and the match of the mid-year, Midnights-Southern Boys.

Honorable mention: Wrestlemania VI, Wrestlewar 90: Wild Thing, and Twin Wars 90 (AWA-NWA show).

BEST BABYFACE OF THE MID-YEAR: Is there any doubt Hulk Hogan. His threat to retire caused more stress in kids than divorce. Honorable Mention: Sting.

BEST HEEL OF THE MID-YEAR: Ric Flair continues to show he can lose every night and still keep heat. His turn on Sting and subsequent run against Luger with the Horsemen was vintage heel Flair.

Honorable Mention: Ole Anderson, Ted DiBiase, Matt Borne, Randy Savage, Curt Hennig, John Tatum, and Larry Zbyszko.

WORST WRESTLER OF THE MID-YEAR: Junkyard Dog. What can be said about a wrestler whose reaction to being hit, punched, and suplexed are the same as not being hit, punched, and suplexed. Honorable Mention: El Gigante.

REGIONAL/INDEPENDENT WRESTLER OF THE YEAR: Jerry Lawler in the USWA has continued to be the best talker in the business and his recent babyface turn could rejuvenate his in-ring work, which has not been on par with his past years.

Honorable Mention: Ricky Rice, Matt Borne, The Grappler, and Tony Atlas. ***

"Potshot" Brickunkel's

SNAPSHOTS

REMEMBERING WRESTLING IN THE MID 70s

BLASSIE'S BULLETS
June, 1975, Nassau Coliseum

The first thing you learn about wrestlers is to ignore their in-ring character. This is much easier these days, as guys turn like overripe fruit on an August afternoon. But in the pre-McMahon days of which I speak, turns were extraordinary occurrences. As a result, most guys went through their entire careers as either a babyface or a heel. Most seventies heels of my limited acquaintance were nice, sometimes even mundane, guys. Just as many faces were arrogant creeps.

Sometimes, though, a guy is cast in one role or the other because they so relentlessly suit it. Haku will never work well as a face, nor will Kevin Sullivan, since they both seem to be genuinely malign human beings. Similarly, the One Muslim Gang, without his mowhawk, is hopeless as a heel. He has that sweet "Moon" face and is obviously an easygoing, nice guy. Ernie Ladd never really worked well as a face because he was an arrogant, surly, and insensitive guy and that reality bled through any attempt to mask it with babyface sugarcoating. Not that he did not have brief heroic spurts - and successful ones - but, like Lex Luger, he always reverted to type.

FREDDIE BLASSIE, a born heel. (Photo by Gary Kamansack)

Freddie Blassie was one of those born heels. He had a cruel streak a mile wide and reveled in humiliating those he felt were of a lower caste than him in the grappling hierarchy, which included nearly everybody. On this particular night, I arrived early for the Nassau WWWF show because I had to deliver the copies of our magazine, Main Event (see footnote), to the Harry Stevens people who sold them at concessions on a 50/50 split. As I entered the long corridor that represented the backstage area, I saw that both the heel and face locker rooms had been opened. None of the Whiff suits had arrived, just Coliseum personnel and ring crew. I fiddled with my cameras and made idle conversation with one of the other folks who worked that journalistic side of the street - a group including the ageless George Napolitano, the eternally balding Bill Apter, the ambitious Peter King, and the eternal lowlife Jimmy Mack and Jay Rosen.

Pinkie Larson was either a member of the ring crew who worked part time as a jobber or a jobber who worked part time with the ring crew. I was never quite sure which, but it was obvious that "Yon (Jon?) Pinkie," as he was introduced before his matches, occupied one of the lowest status positions in the promotion.

Pinkie was working on the ring when I heard the distant rumble of gravel that presaged the arrival of the Classy One, Freddie Blassie, and his voice. What an instrument that voice was. He could reach into dark corners and make muggers feel naked with that voice. It was like a blunt instrument, used in the service of a man who liked nothing better than to beat his social inferiors nearly to death with blunt instruments.

I always liked Fred personally. He was easy to work with and loved to pose for the photos, the lifeblood of Main Event. But I also knew what a cruel dude he could be and it was obvious from his scratchy chortle that he was in the mood for devilment on this particular evening.

I was messing with my camera equipment when Fred spotted me. We were standing between the locker room area and the service tunnel. The sounds of the ring being erected echoed through the empty Coliseum. Fred stopped, then turned toward the ring, scoping out the crew for a likely victim. His eye fell, inevitably, on poor Pinkie.

"Larson!" he barked. "Get over here!" Then he turned to face me.

"What's up, Fred?" I wondered.

"You got any film in that camera:" he wanted to know.

"Not yet. You want me to --?"

"No, keep it empty. That's perfect. Just play along."

His eyes lit up with glee at the prospect of inflicting emotional pain on such a favorite victim. At that instant, as if on cue, Pinkie showed up, his face hopeful for some incomprehensible reason. "Hi, Fred! You wanna Coke?"

Fred looked thunderstruck. "COKE?! Listen, Pinkie, from now on, you don't get Cokes for nobody; they get Cokes for you! C'mere!"

Uh oh. Pinkie's face went white. When Fred started being this nice to him, he knew it was time to sweat. "N-no, Fred, I don't mind. You want one? I'll getcha one!" In other words, he meant, "Pleeeeeease, Fred, let it be that I can get away from you by simply fetching a soda."

"Nah. C'mere, I promised I's give Bill here a scoop and you're it!"

"What d'ya mean, Fred?"

"YOU'RE MY NEW CHAM-PEEN, THAT'S WHAT I MEAN!"

Pinkie tried to smile. He looked sick. "Heh heh. Yeah, right. So, you want that Coke now, Fred?"

"WHAT'RE YOU, DEEF?! YER MAH NEW CHAM-PEEN! Now c'mere and let Bill take our picture! I'm gonna take you right to the top, Larson!"

Pinkie stood about 5'3", weighed nearly 225 pounds, and wore a patina of thin, blond hair above his cherubic face. That face turned bright, cherry red. Fred was dangling a carrot in front of his mouth, but he knew from experience that the carrot would end up in a different part of his anatomy if he stuck around.

"Heh heh. I'll get you that Coke, Fred, and I'll be right back. Heh heh." Laughing weakly, Pinkie backed up from his tormentor, slowly at first, then broke into a run and fled the scene.

Fred looked disgustedly at the shambles of his intended prank. "Ah, well," he observed sagely, "you can't make bullets outta' shit!"

[Footnote: Main Event was the name of both a magazine and a radio show, based in New York City, which covered the WWWF of the mid-70's. "We" consists of Arnie Katz, Joyce Worley, Charlene Komar (my ex-wife), and myself.]

THE WIT AND WISDOM OF GREG GAGNE
Summer, 1976, Davenport, Iowa

I was combining business and pleasure. My ex-wife's sister and her family lived in Arlington Heights, a suburb outside of Chicago, and we planned to visit, so I contacted Scott Epstein about writing some pieces for his Wrestling Training Illustrated magazine. Scott was married to the daughter of Dan Weider and had been given funding to expand Weider's magazines beyond the bodybuilding circuit; wrestling seemed like the ideal subject.

I had done a few free-lance pieces for Scott already and we got along very well. My writing was better than my photos, which is pretty unusual in the wrestling business, but my shots were not bad, so I got the okay to write a series of pieces on the AWA.

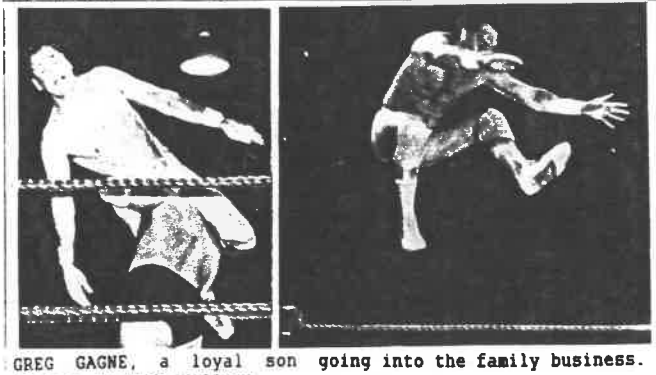
In Chicago, my wife and I met Mike Gratchner, WTI's AWA correspondent. We attended a show at the AWA's version of Madison Square Garden - the Chicago Amphitheater, a big old barn of an arena that was somehow perfect for pro wrestling. Weeks earlier, the Amphitheater had been in the news when a lunatic opened fire on the ring with a high-powered rifle, wounding several ringsiders.

The AWA of the 70's was a fascinating change of pace for me. For one thing, unlike the other promotions, there was almost no turnover of personnel in the AWA. The guys who I saw in the summer of '76 were pretty much the same crew I would have seen the year before and the year after and so on: Kosrow Vazir (who later shaved his head and became The Iron Sheik), Paul Perschman, the ageless Dick the Bruiser, Bobby (Always Ready to Juice) Heenan, Baron Von Raschke, Buddy Wolfe, Larry Hennig, lead heel Ox Baker (the scariest-looking dude I have ever met in person), and young stars Greg Gagne and Jim Brunzell, The High Flyers.

The wrestlers were extremely cooperative. They were used to being ignored by the bi-coastal wrestling press and were both surprised and secretly pleased to see someone "from New York" who had come to get "their story." Never before nor since have I been thanked so often and so sincerely for interviewing people.

I hooked up with John Pinzker, who was Main Event's Midwest Correspondent (our West Coast guy, by the way, was a punk kid by the name of Dave Meltzer) in Davenport, Iowa. John was a wonderful guy and an old-fashioned fan with an endless appetite for match results who gave wrestlers rides to and from the airport.

I, myself, did not get over so great in Davenport. My appearance was slightly avant-garde at this point and though I was never actually fired upon, I was clearly regarded as something "Not of This Earth" by the average Davenporter. Nonetheless, the town was one of those picturesque H.O. Railroad layouts that perfectly suits the image urbanites have of small towns, so I spent a pleasant afternoon strolling by the river and delivering Future Shock to the locals. John pulled up to Sam Drucker's place sometime in the late afternoon and we drove to the local arena where people named Gagne did everything from tearing tickets to selling popcorn. This was a real "Mom & Pop Operation," with impressive efficiency.



GREG GAGNE, a loyal son going into the family business. (Photos by Wade Keller)

Greg was the Loyal Son going into the family business. I found him an affable and intelligent young man with a lot to say. He was also a good worker and the High Flyers were an excellent act. Pinzker gave both Greg and Jimmy a lift to the airport where their own private two-seater awaited them. The plane had been Verne's idea and neither of the boys seemed very enthusiastic about it; two such planes had recently crashed carrying wrestlers Bobby Shane, Ric Flair, Buddy Colt, Johnny Valentine and Mike McCord (Austin Idol).

Greg talked about being a wrestler and gave some marvelous kafabe rationales for how wrestlers were able to "stand the pain" inflicted on them in the ring. I have never forgotten what he told me: "Pain is funny. Before I became a wrestler, if I stubbed my toe, I went nuts. I mean I went crazy. But if you stub your toe over and over and over again eventually you get to the point where it doesn't hurt that much and you're certainly not going to go nuts every time you stub it anymore. That's what it's like in the ring. The first time you get body-slammed, believe me, it knocks you out. But when it happens over and over your body and your brain adjust, and you can stand it. It's amazing what the body can stand."

THE IWA: A Great Notion, Sometime 1976

There is this incredible gap in the history of wrestling. Part of it, of course, is that wrestling history does not extend into the 70's. There are more articles recapitulating the 80's than masked Mexican wrestlers. Baby boomer wrestling fans swoon over recollections from the 50's and 60's, but the 70's is a wrestling "Dead Zone."

From a historian's point of view - and since I have been left this decade as a kind of franchise, I get to take my pick - the most interesting thing about the 70's was the International Wrestling Association. The IWA was the first modern attempt to do what Vince Jr. accomplished less than a decade later, fashion a truly national wrestling promotion through TV. The "Smart Guys and Money Men," like Eddie Einhorn, saw wrestling was a coming thing and decided they could go in there with a slick package and wrap up a nation of wrestling fans. After all, the guys who were currently running the show were mostly a collection of small-timers and downright imbeciles, right? Easy pickings for the "Smart Guys and Money Men," right?

The mistakes of the IWA were legion. By attempting to take on everyone at once, they were fighting on too many fronts. But the reasons they failed had very little to do with the IWA's mistakes. The "SG&MM" played it straight. They paid fairly and they trusted their employees. They failed because every other promotion in wrestling - all those small timers and imbeciles - rose up against them like the Wrath of God. When it came to cut throat dealing, the wrestling boys - most of whom came up through the ranks of boxing, the dirtiest business in the world - made the SG&MM seem like new fish in a tough prison. There were dark rumors of big name wrestlers being met in airports and offered substantial payoffs to no-show crucial IWA cards. Arenas closed their doors to them. In New York, an IWA prime market, they were forced to hold cards in the Beacon Theater, a cavernous uptown movie house, with the ring set up on the stage, surrounded by a small cordon of "ringside" seats. Finally they were able to book an arena - Roosevelt Stadium, a soon-to-be-condemned minor league ballpark in the mosquito-infested New Jersey swamps. The night of their first big show there was a race riot in the stadium, it rained, fans pelted the ring with mudballs, and Ivan Koloff balked at doing a job for IWA Champion, Mil Mascaras, in the main event.

The other reason the IWA failed was the wrestlers themselves. Many bright young stars like Dino Bravo, then a good-looking kid with loads of talent and charisma, seemed to understand the importance of such a national promotion. But too many veterans seemed to take on an attitude of "Hey, they won't be around long, so rip 'em off while you can."

Eirnhorn told us that wrestlers tried to "hold him up" for more money before big shows, threatening to refuse to do the booked finish unless they got an additional payoff. Also, the IWA hired too many veterans and not enough young stars, who would have had more of a stake in the promotion's future.

The Mongols, Pistol Pez Whatley, Luis Martinez, Sky Low Low, Bob Ellis, Johnny Powers, "Cry Baby" George Cannon, Bulldog Browe, Ivan Koloff, Mil Mascaras, the Love Brothers, Eric the Red, Tex MacKenzie, Jerry Lawler, Ernie Ladd, T-Bolt Patterson, Victor Rivera, and Mighty Igor were just some of the stars the IWA signed for big bucks. The IWA also gave fans a chance to see performers like Rikki Starr and Jerry Lawler.

I remember that Roosevelt Stadium show - rain and all - as one of the most exciting experiences of my life. True, it was dimmed slightly when Bulldog Brower did an over-the-ropes into my lap, but only slightly.

More serious was the sharp metal object which struck me in the back while I leaned on the ring apron, taking snapshots of the action. I ignored the first blow, but when I was pelted a second time, I turned around. The crowd stared past me at the action in the ring. Then I looked down and saw two steel-jacketed rifle cartridges at my feet. Live rounds.

The rain was coming down harder and I could see a great cloud of insects rising in the distance. All the major matches had already gone down and I knew, somehow, that when whoever threw those bullets figured out you have to put them in a rifle first, I was in big trouble. So the Main Event crew left a little early.

I had many interesting experiences during my time as a wrestling journalist. How many people can say they sat ringside with "Handsome" Dick Manitoba as their personal guest at Sunnyside Gardens? Not many, I daresay. But that is a story for another time and another Yearbook...

BRUNO SAMMARTINO

Always a gentleman. Always a champion. It is tough to describe to people today the kind of heat Bruno could generate at places like MSG and Boston Garden in the sixties and seventies. Hogan's superman comeback pops a crowd like nothing I have ever heard, but Bruno created HEAT like no other human being in any performance medium.

BRUNO SAMMARTINO looks down with contempt on his greatest mid-seventies opponent, SPRIOS ARYON. The two were actually great pals, as were Bruno and Johnny Valiant. (Photo by Bill Kunkel)

There would come this point in the match where Bruno had been selling for the heel and had been beaten half to death. Then, suddenly, he would catch his opponent off-guard with a boot or a punch - and despite what you may have heard, Bruno was not the Owen Hart of his era as kicks and punches were pretty much his best moves. Then slowly, dramatically, and realistically, Bruno would draw strength from the crowd. He would stand at the center of the ring, righteous rage building within him like an overheating atomic furnace. His hands knotted into fists, he would stand at the center of the ring, slowly turning his head so as to take in the entire crowd. Then, like an angry god, he would shake those fists, as if to ask: "Am I not justified in my wrath?"

"YES!" screamed the crowd. Always. And chills would run down your spine. "You are our chosen champion! Take our strength, our will... out love... and use it to bring justice to this wretched beast who opposes you!"

Interestingly enough, Bruno did not even have a regular finisher during most of the seventies. His back was too bad for him to hoist guys into the Abruzzi Backbreaker and while he used the bearhug, it rarely gained him a submission. Bruno was much more likely to catch a charging heel with an upraised boot while hanging in a corner, then cradle him for a quick pin.

Greatest Opponents: Gorilla Monsoon, Big Bill Miller, Sprios Arion.

He often spoke quite frankly of his desire that his son, David, not follow in his footsteps. He knew what a hard life wrestling could be. He also had to realize that David would never be the superstar he had been and wanted to keep him from being stifled by the gigantic shadow cast by Bruno Sammartino.

It is sad for me to hear Bruno stomping sour grapes on radio shows and on 900 hotlines these days. Fake is fake

"COWBOY" BOBBY DUNCUM advances on BRUNO SAMMARTINO. One of the best series of the period. (Photo by Bill Kunkel)

is fake, and Bruno has to realize that wrestlers from the forties felt the same way about his product in the sixties and seventies that he feels about the business today. That's just natural. I would rather see Bruno devote his energies to the establishment of a pro wrestling Hall of Fame. Bruno must realize, though, that Hulk Hogan belongs there as surely as the Living Legend does.

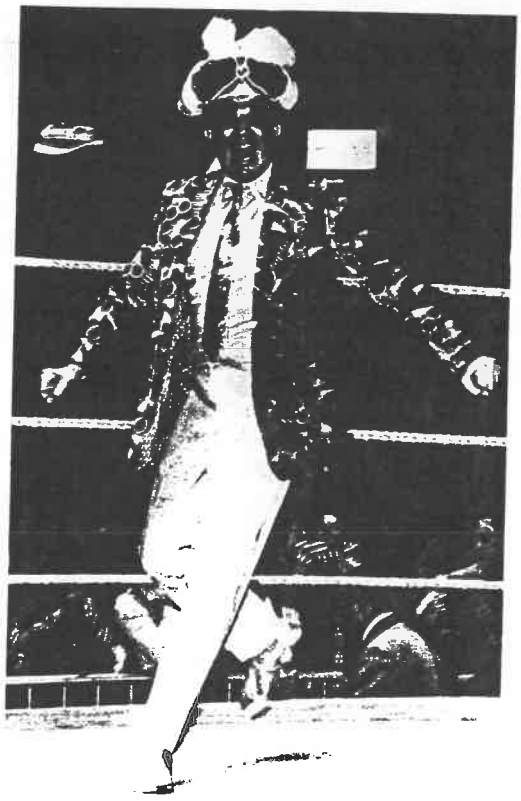
For me, and most fans of my generation and geographic origins, Bruno will always be "the champ." When I think of wrestling heat, I think of 22,000 people at the Garden with a few thousand watching next door in the Felt Forum on closed circuit chanting: "BRU-NO! BRU-NO! BRU-NO! as Sammartino battled his buddy Spiros Arion.

Bru-no! Bru-no! Bru-no!

THE GRAND WIZARD AND BILL APTER

The Wiz was one of the nicest men I ever met. The first time my brother Kenny and I went backstage at Madison Square Garden to cover a card, we got lost. The wrestlers were sharing the Garden with the Ringling Bros. Circus and as we walked through the cavernous backstage area, past cages of tigers and mounds of animal waste, it began to look as if we would never find the dressing rooms.

BRUNO SAMMARTINO and SUPERSTAR GRAHAM engage in one of the many tests of strength. Graham was the Ultimate Warrior of his era, but a very nice guy. (Photo by Bill Kunkel)



No nicer man ever lived than "Mr. Wizard" - THE GRAND WIZARD, aka the Wiz and Abduallah Farouk! (Photo by Bill Kunkel)

Then, suddenly, we heard the voice. Unforgettable, instantly recognizable, the twisted verbal sneer cut through the bleats, roars, and growls of the Ringlings' portable beastiary. Kenny and I turned to one another and mouthed the name, "The Grand Wizard!"

We traced the chortling, arrogant boasting to its source and indeed it was The Wizard, numero uno heel manager in the Whiff, doing an interview with Bill Apter. Without his turban and funny sunglasses, however, he was no malevolent heel. He was just a nice little Jewish man and he immediately interrupted his interview to ask us if we needed any help. We explained briefly who we were and he immediately took us inside and began introducing us around. The most difficult thing, of course, was knowing how to address him. Somehow, "Mr Wizard" did not sound right.

The Wiz then asked Bill Apter if he could further assist us, which Bill did; despite the fact that we were, at least theoretically, competitors. Bill gave Main Event frequent invaluable assistance, even furnishing us with interviews for our radio show, including one of Pamiro Firpo that is one of the five greatest interviews I have ever heard. Apter is and was a genuinely classy man and a typical member of what was then a kind of brotherhood of wrestling journalists.

Over the years, the Wiz helped us time and again, did interviews for us, and helped line up wrestlers when we could not get through to them. He had a silver tongue and a great gimmick and he was one of the great heel managers, but The Grand Wizard I knew, Ernie Roth, was one of the nicest men I ever met.

THE VALIANT BROTHERS

Jimmy was a nice guy, but Johnny was brilliant - if somewhat... erratic. Jimmy would try to do a straight heel interview with you, but once you got Johnny going, forget it. I asked him about his toughest competition since coming to the WWF from the AWA where they had been tag champs. He told me, "Geez, there were a couple of skycaps at Kennedy the other day and they were pretty tough. Basically, though, I guess there's the Bruno Brothers (Sammartino and Strongbow, I presumed) and Kate Smith and The Flying Knats (The Flying Tigers, Pete Sanchez, and Manuel Soto). But I would not classify any of them as top notch opposition. Crossing Lakeside Drive is much tougher."

Jimmy was notorious as an over-enthusiastic juicer. If he had bladed recently, his forehead invariably looked like it had been run over by a lawnmower. When I would ask him about it, he would always tell me it was his girlfriend being overly passionate.

They were an extremely charismatic tag team. I even wrote a song about them which we played on the radio show and sold through the magazine, "The Valiant Story" b/w "Heartpunch of Your Love". Here are some of the lyrics I remember:

We came in from Chicago in a Leerjet
We knew we were the Champions
And we weren't even here yet!
But it's not hard to know
When it's all gonna be your show;
So if you're smart, on the Valiant Boys
You'll bet!

Silver jackets, words of wisdom
Written 'cross our backs
We live the good life,
In platinum Cadillacs!
And our leader, Captain Lou,
Well he always tells us true;
We'll be carrying out our money in laundry sacks!

But these belts are hard to hold
Even when you're young and bold;
So sometimes Johnny's got to slug a referee
We're the Valiant Brothers
We ain't no charity

(Copyright Bill Kunkel (c) 75)

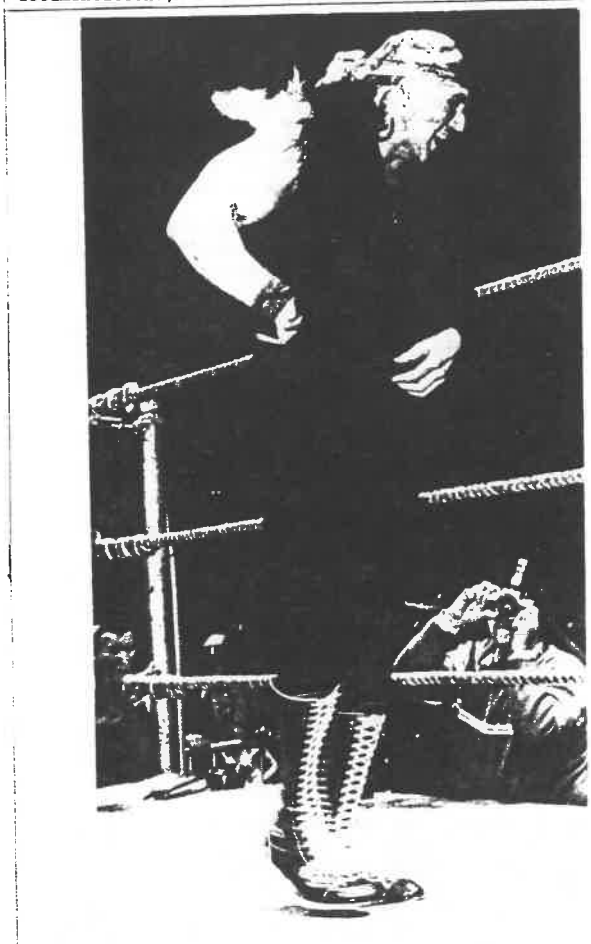
RADIO DAZE

Arnie, Joyce, Charlene, and I had been doing Main Event magazine for a couple of issues when we met Louie "The Voice of Wrestling" Green, one of three co-hosts on what was then the only wrestling radio show in the NYC area. Along with Jimmy Mack, stuttering, unkempt layabout with a handshake reminiscent of gripping a pickled herring, and his partner Jay Rosen, a reasonably intelligent if nerdish specimen who, I am told, currently runs an exterminator business in New York, they formed a truly unforgettable trinity. Their radio show consisted of old news and intermittent battles for possession of the microphone but, out of curiosity, we accepted when they invited us on the air to talk about our magazine.

Let me tell you a little about these characters. Louie Green was a bizarre adolescent, with long, dyed blond hair, long green fingernails, and a collection of outrageous sunglasses that would embarrass Randy Savage. He lived with this old dude, Pete, who was identified as his father, although Pete was always cruising for "pen pals" in the pages of wrestling magazines, so I never really know what to make of him. Louie was wont to answer the phone in either his own voice or in the persona of his "sister, Louise." He spoke in a nasal whine that no words could adequately describe. He later resurfaced on yet another wrestling show under the identity of "Captain Dan Diver." I have no idea where he is today and do not especially care.

DEAN HO "The Happy Hawaian" advances on WALDO VON ERICH. I had an interview scheduled with Waldo once, so I looked into the heel locker room and asked "Baron" Michel Sicluna where he was. "He's taking a shit," he told me. We then heard a satisfied grunt from the adjoining john. "He's taking a gooooood shit," Sicluna amended. (By B.K.)

Jay Rosen was the promoter of the group. He was also the only member of the trio whose very presence on the radio was not an affront to the memory of General Sarnof. His... eccentricity took the form of a violent hatred for Pedro Morales, WWF Champ during most of their show's run. Jay's idea of high humor was to play "FeliceNavidad," a Spanish Christmas song, several times each show. He once published a fanzine that contained a bogus "interview" with Morales. The Pedro quotes were all lifted, verbatim, from a Bill Apter interview which had been published several months earlier in one of the Victory Sports Series magazines (speaking of which - and I know I an going off on a tangent here, but bear with me, please - anyone who can lay hands on the VSS magazines from this period, especially INSIDE WRESTLING, please contact me. This was truly the high noon of the Apter era, when he created columnists including: "Matt Brock" the wisened veteran of a thousand smoke-filled arenas who returns to his motel room after the matches with a bottle of bourbon and a battered old Smith-Corona to pound out the Next Big Stories: Randy Gordon, current New York State Boxing Commissioner, but back then an over-agressive adolescent who endlessly reported a series of maginary practical jokes he claimed to have played on heels in the dressing room; and the late great heel columnist, Dan Shockett. Not to mention apartment house wrestling, the greatest work in magazines history and itself a worthy subject for future documentation.)



Photographer loved to watch the SUPERSTAR strut. (Photo by Bill Kunkel)

In any case, Rosen reprinted Pedro's answers but inserted his own questions which made him seem like he was insulting and bullying Morales into responding! So, whereas Bill Apter might have asked, "So what's next for you, Pedro?", Rosen replaced the question with his own, along the lines of; "We all know you're a no-talent bum, Morales, and you have absolutely no future in pro wrestling! Heck, I might slap you around a little myself if you have the guts to disagree!" At which point he inserted Pedro's naturally polite and reasoned response.

Even in triumvirate, however, the third member stood out as particularly weird and unsavory. Jimmy Mack had a terrible stutter, on and off the air, but had no qualms about starting and advertising the "J-J-J-Jimmy M-M-Mack S-School of B-B-B-B-Broadc-c-c-casting!" Several people, including "Professor" Elliot Maron, told me Mack lived in a condemned building in the Bronx, a la Ratso Rizzo, whom he resembled both physically and spiritually.

SUPERSTAR GRAHAM stares into the camera as he has BRUNO right where he wants him. (Photo by Bill Kunkel)

Jimmy Mack had gained considerable infamy in broadcasting circles for the various stunts he pulled while at WHBI.FM, the station which hosted all the wrestling radio shows of the seventies because time could be purchased by literally anyone, and was. Engineers at the studio related how he had twice been thrown out of the studio, once for defacating the trash barrel which was being used to block the entrance to the out-of-order bathroom and on another occasion for running a "Win a Dream Date with Jimmy Mack" contest over the air.

As you can imagine, it took us quite a while to distinquish ourselves from our disreputable competition. All you had to say around a wrestler in those days was "I'm from the Wrestling Radio show on WHBI," and they would start backing up. In any case, we showed up for our guest appearance but never got on the air. The terrible trinity spent the entire hour arguing over who was going to pay for the time. We did get to hear them a week later, but passed on a second invite. The show defied description, consisting of total nonsense, old results, and insulting phone calls from listeners, punctuated by prolonged struggles for possession of the microphone: "Gimmie the mike, you bastid!" Louis shrieked, signalling a wild on-the-air melee complete with sounds of crashing, screams, and thuds as the three hosts fell to the studio floor in a mad scramble to possess the power source.

It did not take long before we turned to one another and uttered those Famous Last Words. "Good grief, we can certainly do better than that!"

The rest, as they say, is history. (To be continued)... ***

PART 2: THE FIRST TORCH QUOTEBOOK (10/87)

"MR MAGNIFICENT" KEVIN KELLY: "Why don't you pit on your running shoes and take a few laps around my back."

RANDY SAVAGE: "I'm going to be a human torpedo on you, Kamala."

PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY: "I now introduce to you, the late Liberace's favorite wrestler, Adorable Adrian Adonis."

MISSY HYATT on Comrade Orca: "Look at the big round lady."

GORILLA MONSOON: "The fans are literally handing from the rafters.

BOBBY HEENAN on Elizabeth: "She's a woman, of course she's helpless."

RANDY SAVAGE on The Honkeytonk Man: "He doesn't know the difference between a guitar string and a G-string." ***

THE STEELE RINGPOST
WITH JEFF STEELE

Sometimes I wonder if anyone but Mick Karch and myself really understand. So many of the people who read, write, and publish the sheets only really became interested in wrestling on or before 1984. Do not get me wrong, I am not getting critical. Some of you, after all, are simply to young to have been interested in pro wrestling during the 70's and early eighties.

Mick, it really is a lot different now, isn't it? I guess I am kind of like you, ol' buddy. We had a front row ringside crew where everybody knew everybody. Every Wednesday night at the Fairgrounds Coliseum in Jackson, MS we made our weekly pilgrimage to worship at the altar of our favorite escape valve, professional wrestling.

Around the office everyone knew that Wednesday was a Holy day. In fact, I took the entire day off. It was not uncommon for someone to call my office at the radio station and upon asking for me, receive the following reply. "Oh, Jeff goes to wrestling on Wednesday nights and he takes off all day just to get prepared."

Me and John Horton had standing front row reservations and we did not miss. Neither did the fat lady with no teeth who always brought her camera to ringside. One night, back when it was an automatic disqualification to do so, Assassin #2 came off the top rope to gain a pin on Steven Little Bear while referee Jerry Usher's back was turned. While everybody got really upset about it, Usher played the part of "knowing nothing because his back was turned and you can't call them if you can't see them."

But wait Jerry... N.T.F., short for No Toothed Fatso, had a Polaroid of the perpetrator with the illegal move in the act. What do you do with that, Usher? Well, Usher did what he did better than anyone I ever saw. He got this "I can't believe it" look on his face and went stomping back to the dressing room to "see if I can get to the bottom of this." And by the time the next guy refereed the following match and Usher came back out for the main event, all was forgotten.

All forgotten except for this woman. I swear to you that every week until he retired this lady would meet Usher as he came out for the first event and confront him with that damn picture. It was hysterical...

It is amazing how quiet four thousand people can become during a boring match. It is equally incredible how much noise five or six of us "smart-asses" could make during these "quiet times."

One of our favorite things to do in the middle of an otherwise uneventful prelim bout was to start screaming as a group that the babyface was "Pulling the Tights, TIGHTS, TIGHTS!" Or the infamous, "Hair! Hair! Hair!." Ten or twelve of us timed our actions just as we would have in a hot match. It would drive referee Jerry Usher as well as the wrestlers crazy as we were loud.

Being in the front row, we could not be ignored. There was a prelim guy named Igor Putski, supposedly Ivan's cousin, who lost thirty pounds, changed the style of his tights, and changed his name to Rick Ferrera, thinking no one would notice. From the start of all his matches until they were finished, we chanted, "Igor! Igor! Igor!" He never had a chance.

One night "Igor" was wearing bright yellow tights and was apparently experiencing some stomach trouble. During the course of the match, he had a little quirk. It was not that bad. In fact, the folks in the peanut seats might not have noticed, but we did. And we let everybody know! We stood and began screaming for all we were worth, "He shit in his tights! He shit in his tights!" We were calling for his immediate disqualification. Eddie Murphy never heard four thousand people laugh as loud as we laughed that night. I never saw Igor Ferrara Rick Putski again...

One night Bill Watts was in a main event against Terry Gordy. At ringside for all the matches were two old codgers from the Disabled American Veterans, the local sponsoring group. They were the time keeper and bell ringer. They were true believers.

One night they rang the bell to end a match because the heel had done a move that should have had him disqualified. Of course, Jerry Usher had his back turned. When they rang the bell, Usher was livid. "What in the hell are you doing!" he screamed loud enough to be picked up by the house mic. The old vet picked up the house mic and answered in a drawl heard only this far south: "We disqualified him!" You get the picture.

Watts came out and Gordy did not let him in the ring. So Watts went over to one of the vets and demanded that he give him his chair. Watts obviously forgot the purpose of an organization called Disabled American Veterans and could not understand why the crippled vet did not get up. So what did our hero, the great American Bill Watts, do? He picked up the chair and dumped the crippled veteran on the concrete floor.

Then all hell broke loose. Disabled veterans, who served as ushers too, came from all directions to assist their crippled comrade who was laying on the concrete floor twitching as though he had just been piledriven by Terry Funk. Gil Culkin was the local promoter. The uninjured veteran got on the house mic and screamed, "Gil Culkin, get your ass down here now! You've got a lawsuit on your hands, boy."

Now stop for a moment and picture this: Your number one babyface in the middle of the ring with a chair being showered with every kind of debris imaginable and being booed boistiferously because in Jackson, MS you do not screw around with crippled veterans; we do not care who in the hell you are. Back to the picture: Watts standing in the middle of the ring where in a space of about two minutes he became the most hated man in the city. He was wearing a look on his face much like a man who was just shoved nude into the girls locker room.

Gordy, the heel, was on the outside of the ring. Because he really was a decent guy and at that time was quite young, actually was over expressing concern and helping the crippled veteran who obviously was hurt. Probably twenty-five disabled American vets were helping the guy while pointing and screaming threats at Bill Watts.

After at least fifteen minutes passed and they got the veteran into his wheelchair, ready to leave the building, Watts sensed he needed to do something. He got on the house mic and said to the veteran, "Look, I'm sorry you got hurt. But when I tell you to give me the chair, I mean give me the damn chair!"

I do not know what kind of response Bill expected, but what he got was booed even more followed by the veteran shooting him the bird. The veteran received a big ovation as he was wheeled out.

I remember the night I found Ken Patera was not so nice of a guy. I was fifteen years old or so and I walked up to the babyface Patera who had just turned pro and asked him how much money he was making as a wrestler.

He responded to this young teenager, "How much do you make? You f*ck-wad punk." They could have put him under the jail and it would not have bothered me.

Then one night I met a young bad guy, Mike Hayes. He took the time to talk to a young teenager and made a real impression. Even better, when he came out for his match, he recognized me in the front row and nodded.

These are the kinds of experiences you cannot get at a "supercard" or at a pay-per-view show get-together or for that matter, even if you go to the pay-per-view show. These kind of experiences were only possible when your city was a regular weekly stopping point for one of the many regional circuits that operated prior to eighty-four explosion. Remember, Mick.

I am involved in the recording industry as well as everything else I do. Our field is called "Southern Gospel." The groups in our field basically travel a regular circuit. You would be shocked at the number of people that attend our concerts that are also wrestling fans.

I have a theory. My theory is that any entertainment form that basically works a regular circuit is going to draw certain types of people to their shows. I call it "The Circuit Mentality" that motivates people to attend these shows. They see the entertainer on a regular basis. Usually the circuit entertainer mingles with the crowd either, as in our case at the record table, or in the case of wrestlers, in front of the dressing room or at the souvenir table. If the person is a regular at the events, the entertainer will get to know the fan at the very least well enough to recognize them and in many cases well enough to eat, visit, drink, or yes, even sleep with them. The circuit entertainer is the last of the entertainers who can personally relate to their fans. They are approachable, touchable, real people who make the fan feel important because they can say of the entertainer, "I know them."

Never mind that the circuit entertainer has "these people" in every city. For this night you know them and it makes you feel important.

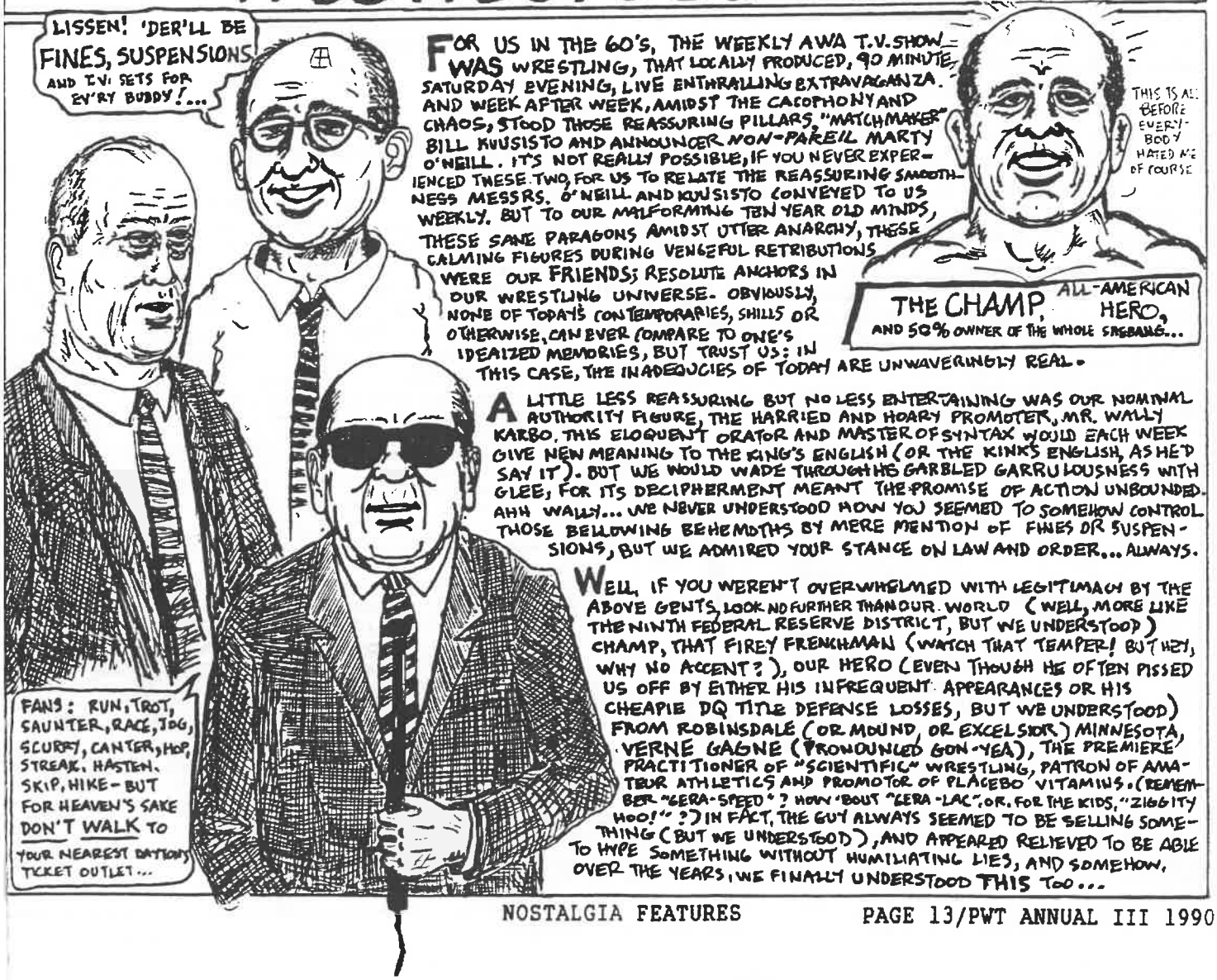
Wrestling has for the most part, left the circuit and for this reason I believe it is struggling to survive. Our Gospel music is not mainstream and cannot survive being promoted as such. Wrestling is not mainstream either. If it is promoted as such, to the mainstream, it will always ultimately fail. If wresting is to survive the nineties, it is going to have to go back to regional circuits that work cities on a weekly basis where the programs work from week to week.

When wrestling was fun, this is how it worked. How I wish I could attend a Wednesday night card again. ***

MR. MIKE'S MONDO

... AND NOW FOR SOMETHING, ER' SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT, AS WE INSTEAD OF OUR USUAL TRENCHANT TRASHING OF WHATEVER CONTEMPORY CONTRETEMPS, WE SOFTEN THE SATIRICAL SWORD WITH SOMETHING AKIN TO NOSTALGIA. YOU SEE, WHETHER YOU'RE ONE OF THOSE WHO LIKE OUR DRAWINGS BUT DON'T KNOW WHY WE INSIST ON WRITING STUFF OR NOT, WE'VE BEEN DOING IT FOR A **LONG, LONG** TIME, A DEFINITE DEGENERATIVE CONDITION TO BE SURE. AND HOW WE **GOT** THIS WAY IS, NO DOUBT, DUE IN PART TO **OUR...**

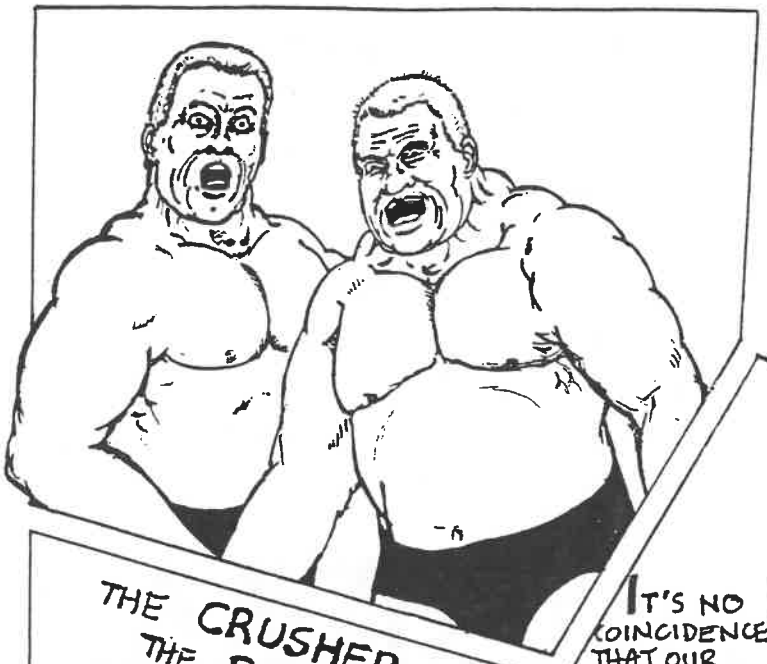
MEMORABLE WRESTLING *moments* FROM A MISSPENT YOUTH...


LISSEN! 'DER'LL BE FINES, SUSPENSIONS AND T.V. SETS FOR EV'RY BUDDY!...
FANS: RUN, TROT, SAUNTER, RACE, JOG, SCURRY, CANTER, HOP, STREAK, HASTEN, SKIP, HIKE - BUT FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE DON'T WALK TO YOUR NEAREST BATTONS TICKET OUTLET...
THIS IS ALL BEFORE EVERY-BODY HATED ME OF COURSE
THE CHAMP, ALL-AMERICAN HERO, AND 50% OWNER OF THE WHOLE SHEBANG...

FOR US IN THE 60'S, THE WEEKLY AWA T.V. SHOW WAS WRESTLING, THAT LOCALLY PRODUCED, 90 MINUTE, SATURDAY EVENING, LIVE ENTHRALLING EXTRAVAGANZA. AND WEEK AFTER WEEK, AMIDST THE CACOPHONY AND CHAOS, STOOD THOSE REASSURING PILLARS, "MATCHMAKER" BILL KUUSISTO AND ANNOUNCER *NON-PAREIL* MARTY O'NEILL. IT'S NOT REALLY POSSIBLE, IF YOU NEVER EXPERIENCED THESE TWO, FOR US TO RELATE THE REASSURING SMOOTHNESS MESSRS. O'NEILL AND KUUSISTO CONVEYED TO US WEEKLY. BUT TO OUR MALFORMING TEN YEAR OLD MINDS, THESE SANE PARAGONS AMIDST UTTER ANARCHY, THESE CALMING FIGURES DURING VENGEFUL RETRIBUTIONS WERE OUR FRIENDS; RESOLUTE ANCHORS IN OUR WRESTLING UNIVERSE. OBVIOUSLY, NONE OF TODAY'S CONTEMPORARIES, SHILLS OR OTHERWISE, CAN EVER COMPARE TO ONE'S IDEALIZED MEMORIES, BUT TRUST US: IN THIS CASE, THE INADEQUACIES OF TODAY ARE UNWAVERINGLY REAL.

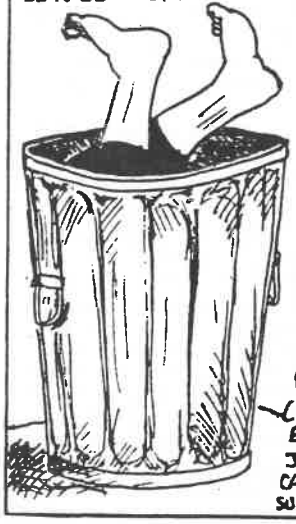
A LITTLE LESS REASSURING BUT NO LESS ENTERTAINING WAS OUR NOMINAL AUTHORITY FIGURE, THE HARRIED AND HOARY PROMOTER, MR. WALLY KARBO. THIS ELOQUENT ORATOR AND MASTER OF SYNTAX WOULD EACH WEEK GIVE NEW MEANING TO THE KING'S ENGLISH (OR THE KINKS ENGLISH, AS HE'D SAY IT). BUT WE WOULD WADE THROUGH HIS GARBLED GARRULOUSNESS WITH GLEE, FOR ITS DECIPHERMENT MEANT THE PROMISE OF ACTION UNBOUNDED. AHH WALLY... WE NEVER UNDERSTOOD HOW YOU SEEMED TO SOMEHOW CONTROL THOSE BELLOWING BEHEMOTHS BY MERE MENTION OF FINES OR SUSPENSIONS, BUT WE ADMIRED YOUR STANCE ON LAW AND ORDER... ALWAYS.

WELL, IF YOU WEREN'T OVERWHELMED WITH LEGITIMACY BY THE ABOVE GENTS, LOOK NO FURTHER THAN OUR WORLD (WELL, MORE LIKE THE NINTH FEDERAL RESERVE DISTRICT, BUT WE UNDERSTOOD) CHAMP, THAT FIREY FRENCHMAN (WATCH THAT TEMPER! BUT HEY, WHY NO ACCENT?), OUR HERO (EVEN THOUGH HE OFTEN PISSED US OFF BY EITHER HIS INFREQUENT APPEARANCES OR HIS CHEAPIE DQ TITLE DEFENSE LOSSES, BUT WE UNDERSTOOD) FROM ROBINSDALE (OR MOUND, OR EXCELSIOR) MINNESOTA, VERNE GAGNE (PRONOUNCED GON-YEA), THE PREMIERE PRACTITIONER OF "SCIENTIFIC" WRESTLING, PATRON OF AMATEUR ATHLETICS AND PROMOTOR OF PLACEBO VITAMINS. (REMEMBER "GERA-SPEED"? HOW 'BOUT "GERA-LAC", OR, FOR THE KIDS, "ZIGGITY HOO!"?) IN FACT, THE GUY ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE SELLING SOMETHING (BUT WE UNDERSTOOD), AND APPEARED RELIEVED TO BE ABLE TO HYPE SOMETHING WITHOUT HUMILIATING LIES, AND SOMEHOW, OVER THE YEARS, WE FINALLY UNDERSTOOD **THIS** TOO...



THE CRUSHER & THE BRUISER AND HIS "COUSIN"

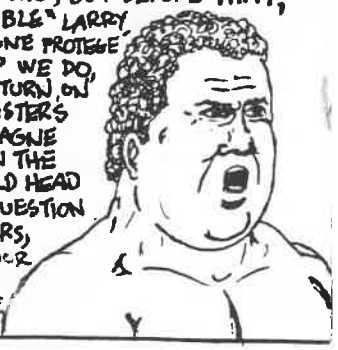
IT'S NO COINCIDENCE THAT OUR EARLIST MEMORY IS OF THESE TWO, A VIVID YET VAGUE SIGHT BITE OF UNCERTAIN T.V. ORIGIN, ALTHOUGH OUR GUESS, AS IT WAS CLEARLY NOT A LOCAL TELECAST, IS A BROADCAST FROM (CHICAGO'S?) MARIGOLD ARENA -- IN ANY CASE, THE IMPRESSION IS INDELIBLE: HATRED, LOATHING AND FEAR. THEY WERE, AFTER ALL, CONSUMATE HEELS (THIS IS AROUND 1959 OR SO) AND REMAINED SO INTO THE EARLY 60'S. THEIR "TURN", THOUGH NOT IMMEDIATE, WAS INEVITIBLE, AS OUR NEXT NEXT MEMORIES SUGGEST. BY 1963 OR SO, TWO DIFFERENT FEUDS WERE, FOR OUR IMPRESSIONABE SEVEN YEAR OLD MINDS, QUITE ENOUGH TO BEGIN A LIFELONG LOVE AFFAIR (MOSTLY WITH THE CRUSHER YOU UNDERSTAND; SINCE FOR SOME REASON HE REMAINED A TWIN CITIES REGULAR WHILE THE BRUISER STAYED EAST OF CHICAGO, EXCEPT OF COURSE, THOSE NUMEROUS AND WONDERFUL TIMES THEY HELD THE TAG TITLE). ALTHOUGH THEIR TAG-TEAM FEUD WITH THOSE DESPICABLE COMMIE RUSKIES THE KAMILKOFF BROTHERS HAD GREATER ACCLAIM AND ESTABLISHED C & B FOREVER AS BABIES, WE BETTER RECALL A SINGLES FEUD BETWEEN 'CRUSH AND THE NEFARIOUS MITSU ARAKAWA WITH HIS SALT THROWING AND STOMACH CLAW. GOOD THING THAT CRUSHER HAD A PRETTY WICKED STOMACH CLAW OF HIS OWN, AND ONE THING EVEN BETTER: HIS VIVID WIT AND DEMENTED IMAGINATION, A TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF WHICH BEING HIS CONCLUSION OF THE ARAKAWA FEUD: A PROMISE TO (AND NO DOUBT DELIVERY OF) STUFFING THE JAP INTO A GARBAGE CAN. WHO COULD FORGET SUCH A SPORTING FINISH?



STAN "KRUSHER" KOWALSKI & TINY MILLS

WHAT WE REMEMBER BEST ABOUT THESE TWO IS THEIR HAIR: IT WAS INCREDIBLY LONG (EVEN FOR NOW, AND THIS WAS 1960), STRINGY, WILD, AND A DASTARDLY WEAPON: THEY'D LOAD IT UP WITH BRYLCREAM OR SOMETHING (THE OL' "GREASEY KID STUFF TO BE SURE) AND RUB IT INTO THEIR ENEMIES' EYES. OUCH! // ACTUALLY, THEY WERE A PRETTY UNLIKELY TEAM. MILLS' PRIME WAS MORE IN THE EARLY 50'S, ALTHOUGH THE RUGGED LUMBERJACK ROUTINE STILL SOLD IN 1960. HIS PARTNER, A DECENT SIZE BRAWLER OF DUBIOUS TECHNICAL ABILITY GOT HIS RING NAME DUE TO HIS ADMIRATION OF MARLON BRANDO MOVIES, BUT TOGETHER, THEY MADE A POTENT PAIR THAT STAYED ON TOP FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS // THE REAL REASON WE REMEMBER THEM SO WAS THE HAZY KNOWLEDGE THAT "KRUSHER" WAS SOME SORTA THIRD OR FOURTH COUSIN ON DAD'S SIDE OF THE FAMILY. SO DESPITE THEIR HEINOUS VILLAINY, OR OUR PARENTS' OBVIOUS LOATHING OF WRESTLING'S ENTIRE EXISTENCE, WE DIDN'T CARE: MAYBE KRUSHER WAS SOME UNRULY WILD ANIMAL, BUT HE MADE PRO 'RASSLIN A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE FOR US, AND WAS OUR FIRST GENUINE HERO.

YOU ALL KNOW LARRY "THE AXE" HENNIG, WHO'S MUCH MORE THAN CURT'S DADDY. BEFORE THAT, HE WAS FOR YEARS LARRY "PRETTY BOY" HENNIG, BUT BEFORE THAT, DO YOU REMEMBER "HUMBLE" LARRY HENNIG, BABYFACE VERNE GAGNE PROTEGE AND CERTAIN STAR OF THE FUTURE? WE DO, AS WELL AS HIS SUBSEQUENT FRANKENSTEIN MONSTER TURN ON HIS MENTOR. WE ALL KNEW HE WASN'T IN THE MASTER'S LEAGUE, BUT SOMEHOW HIS ACCUSATIONS THAT GAGNE WOULD CHEAT BY BLINDING AN OPPONENT WHEN THE OVERHEAD STUDIO LIGHTS REFLECTED OFF HIS BALD HEAD HAD A CERTAIN RING OF VALIDITY... WITHOUT QUESTION THOUGH, THE PRETTY BOY PROVIDED THRILLS FOR YEARS, ESPECIALLY IN THE TAG TEAM MILIEU AS THE SENIOR PARTNER WITH HARLY RACE (AN INCREDIBLE HEEL TEAM), LARS ANDERSON, AND EVEN DUSTY RHODES



THE CRUSHER VS. BLACKJACK LANZA AND GORGEOUS BOBBY HEENAN AFTER A JUNE 19, 1971 CAGE MATCH - MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA...

NO QUESTION: WHENEVER THE ERA, WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, WHOMEVER THE OPPOSITION OR HOWEVER WE WERE PREOCCUPIED, OVER THE YEARS ONE WRESTLER ('RASSLER) DISTINCTLY STOOD APART: THE "WRESTLER WHO MADE MILWAUKEE FAMOUS", THE CRUSHER. OVERALL, THE MOST ENTERTAINING SINGLE PERFORMER WE EVER SAW (AND YEAH, GRANTED, WE UNDERSTAND TIMES WERE "SIMPLER" THEN, AT LEAST WE WERE, BUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT HERE IS THIS: THE ABILITY TO INSPIRE IMAGINATION, ADMIRATION, COMMITMENT AND ULTIMATLY, MEMORIES).

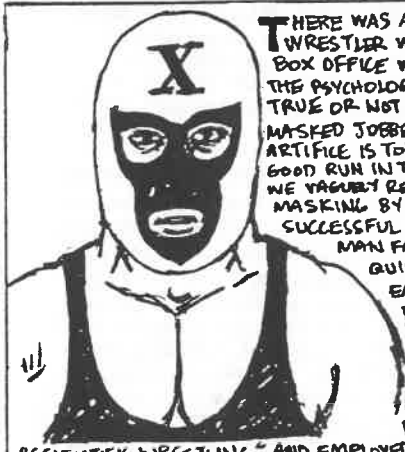
CRUSHER HAD THAT UNIQUE STATUS AMIDST THE COMPANY: THE ULTIMATE ARBITRER OF THE PECKING ORDER, UNNEEDFUL OF RECOGNIZED CHAMPIONSHIP TITLES, BUT THE "PEOPLES" CHAMP DEFACTO. SIMPLY THE TOP BABYFACE AT ALL TIMES. HIS WAS THE PROMISE OF AN ULTIMATE ACCOUNTING; ONLY THE WINNER SURVIVES -- A CERTAIN BLOODLETTING ORGY, WITH A DENOUEMENT OF VINDICATION & RETRIBUTION (AND THESE WERE THE DAYS WHEN ANGLES **HAD** BEGINNINGS, MIDDLES AND ENDS) AND FOR YEARS, ESSENTIONALLY WITHOUT FAIL, THE CRUSHER DELIVERED.

YET HIS GREATEST TALENT MAY HAVE BEEN OUTSIDE THE RING - HIS CLASSIC STICK WORK: A HIGH DECIBEL, SIDE OF THE MOUTH - GRAVEL VOICED, EPITHET COLORED (ALL FOES WERE "DEM BUMS") STYLE WITH A CONSTANT, INGENIOUS WIT THAT WOULD AMUSE EVEN THE OTHERWISE MOST STRIDENT CRITICS OF OUR FAVORITE PSEUDO SPORT. HE WAS THE BESTOWER OF THE DERISIVE NICKNAME, LIKE "THE DOLLY SISTERS" FOR HENNIG & RACE OR "QUACK QUACK" FOR DR. X, AND THE PERPETRATOR OF THE OUTRAGEOUS STUNT, FROM THE AFOREMENTIONED ARAKAWA GARBAGE CAN TO THROWING DOG FOOD AT MADDOG VACHON. HE USED MANY MEMORABLE PROPS OVER THE YEARS, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH WAS THE EVERPRESENT FOOT LONG STOGIE... NOW YOU KNOW WHO TO BLAME FOR STARTING US ON THIS OVERLONG LOVE/HATE AFFAIR.

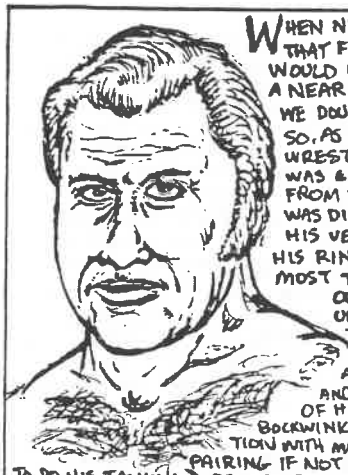
OVER THE YEARS OUR INTEREST IN FOLLOWING WRESTLING HAS BEEN VARIED. FROM OUR EARLIEST MEMORIES TO THE MID 1960'S WE WATCHED THE WEEKLY TV AND READ THE OLDER BROTHERS' WRESTLING MAGS. THE JAN. 1967 ISSUE OF **WRESTLING REVUE** WAS THE FIRST ONE BOUGHT FOR OURSELVES. SOMETIME THAT YEAR WE ALSO (FINALLY) ATTENDED OUR FIRST LIVE CARD, AT LAST BEING OLD ENOUGH TO GO ALONE ('CAUSE NOONE IN THE FAMILY WOULD EVER GO WITH US. THERE WERE LIMITS TO HOW MUCH THEY'D HUMOR THIS WEIRD KID), AND RECALL GOING EVERY FEW MONTHS. DURING THESE YEARS, WE FONDLY RECALL THE LIKES OF KILLER KOWALSKI, REGGIE PARKS, WILBUR SNYDER, MADDOG VACHON, THE ALASKAN (JAY YORK), HENNIG & RACE, JOHNNY POWERS, JOHNNY VALENTINE, COWBOY JACK LANZA, FOR SOME REASON, RENE GOULET, AND LOTS OF OTHERS INCLUDING THE "LOSERS" WHOSE FUNCTION WE ONLY SLOWLY BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND: WE SPENT SEVERAL YEARS WONDERING WHEN KENNY JAY WOULD BE INTERVIEWED AFTER WINNING HIS MATCH.

OUR FOLLOWING BECAME SPORADIC BY THE END OF THE SIXTIES, THOUGH WE WERE AWARE OF THE STANDOUTS LIKE DR. X, COWBOY BILL WATTS, THE "CHAIN GANG" (ONE OF OUR FAVORITES, A HILARIOUS ACT ONE OF WHOM WAS THE UBIQUITOUS DONNIE FARGO), ETC, BUT IN THE SUMMER OF 1970 WE GOT SERIOUS BIG TIME: FALLING IN WITH A FEW FELLOW PROTO-MONDOITES AND GAINING A WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF THE TWIN CITIES BUS SYSTEM, WE STARTED GOING TO EVERY MINNEAPOLIS AUDITORIUM (AND AN OCCASIONAL ST. PAUL) SHOW AND DID SO FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS. EVENTUALLY THE NOVELTY WORE THIN, NOT THAT WE DIDN'T APPRECIATE A WORKING CREW THE LIKES OF BOCKWINKLE & STEVENS, SUPERSTAR BILLY GRAHAM, IVAN KOLOFF, DUSTY RHODES AND A FEW OTHERS, BUT IT ALL JUST BECAME TOO PREDICTABLE. WE STILL WATCHED THE TEEVEE AND COLLECTED THE MAGS, BUT BY 1973 OTHER THINGS STARTED HAPPENING.

FROM 1974 TO '79 IT WAS ALL A BLUR; WE PRETTY MUCH FELL AWAY FROM THE WHOLE CHARADE. IN THE REAL WORLD, WE STARTED COLLEGE AND WERE IN THE COMIC BOOK BIZ (SELLING 'EM, NOT MAKING 'EM), AND MORE CONTRIBUTORY, IN THE WRESTLING WORLD, TV GOT SHIFTED TO SOME HORRIBLE TIME SLOT LIKE 11:00 PM SATURDAYS AND BECAME IMPOSSIBLE TO CATCH. COUPLE THIS WITH A TALENT "POOL" LIKE IVAN PUTSKI RUFUS JONES, BORIS BREZNIKOFF, ANGELO MOSCA, GREG GAGNE AND SUCH, WELL... SURPRISED?



THERE WAS A TIME ONCE WHEN A MASKED WRESTLER WAS A UNIQUE GIMMICK AND MEANT BOX OFFICE WHEN PROMOTED ON TOP. THEY SAY THE PSYCHOLOGY IS DIFFERENT NOW... WHICH IF TRUE OR NOT MAKES LITTLE DIFFERENCE SINCE MASKED JOBBERS ABOUND AND THE WHOLE SILLY ARTIFICE IS TODAY PASSE'. DR. BILL MILLER HAD A GOOD RUN IN THE EARLY 60'S AS "MR. M" (WHOM WE VAGUELY REMEMBER UNTIL HIS CLIMACTIC UNMASKING BY CHAMP GAGNE), BUT THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AWA MASKED MAN BEDANAS "A MAN FROM THE AUDIENCE" ANGLE IN FIG, QUIETLY ISSUEING A CHALLENGE AT EACH WEEK'S (LIVE) TV SHOW UNTIL FINALLY, RECEIVING NO RESULTS, SNEAK ATTACKED (GAGNE? THIS WE DON'T RECOLLECT) HIS OBSECTIVE AND REVEALED HIMSELF AS: **DR. X**. HE WAS OF COURSE A 'BRUTAL VILLAIN', BUT HE WAS ALSO PROFICENT AT "SCIENTIFIC WRESTLING" AND EMPLOYED THAT MOST BELIEVABLE OF SUBMISSION HOLDS, THE "FIGURE FOUR LEG LOCK" (IT REALLY ACTUALLY USED TO WIN MATCHES IN THOSE DAYS)... THE 'DOC' STAYED ON TOP A FULL THREE YEARS, FACING ALMOST EVERY BABYFACE IN CREATION BESIDES PROTRACTED FEUDS WITH GAGNE AND THE CRUSHER, AND NEVER WAS HE DEFINITIVLY DEFEATED. HE WAS A MOST EXASPERATING "MAN OF MYSTERY" -- WHO IS THIS GUY?? WE SURE WANTED TO KNOW, AND HOPED IN VAIN AT EACH ATTEMPT TO UNMASK HIM, AND BELIEVED WALLY KARBO EVERYTIME HE BROUGHT IN A HIRED HATCHET MAN TO BEAT AND UNMASK "X" THAT HE "HOPED THIS TIME IT'LL HAPPEN BECAUSE I WANT TO KNOW WHO DR X IS MYSELF"... WE PATIENTLY TRIED TO IGNORE SUCH SKEPTICS LIKE OUR FATHER WHO ASKED "YEAH, WELL WHO DOES (WALLY KARBO) MAKE OUT THE PAY CHECKS TO?". COME ON DAD! DON'T BUG US WITH LOGIC! -- AS MEMORABLE AS X'S LONG REIGN AS A WINNER WAS HIS FINAL MANNER OF LEAVING: A SUDDENLY SET UP FEUD WITH LANZA & HEENAN. SET TO TEAM FOR A MATCH THAT NIGHT (8-8-70), X AND LANZA HAD A FALLING OUT ON THE TV SHOW, X BLOODIED IN THE PROCESS. MAIN EVENT CHANGE! BUT X ONLY GOT A SMALL PIECE OF REVENGE THAT NIGHT, TO GET A REMATCH (8-29-70) HE AGREED TO UNMASK. WELL, X LOST THAT MATCH, BUT WE AS FANS LOST EVEN MORE.



WHEN NICK BOCKWINKLE ENTERED THE AWA THAT FIRST WEEK OF DECEMBER, 1970, WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED IT WAS THE START OF A NEAR 20 YEAR STINT OF TOTAL DOMINATION? WE DOUBT HE DID, BUT WE'RE GRATEFUL IT WAS SO. AS OUR GRADUAL UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WRESTLING IS (AND ISN'T) OVER THE YEARS WAS GREATLY AIDED BY HIS PRESENCE. FROM THE FIRST, HE PUT US ALL ON NOTICE HE WAS DIFFERENT, AS WAS SOON OBVIOUS WITH HIS VERBAL INTELLIGENCE AN EXTENSION OF HIS RING SKILL. HE WAS, FROM THE START, ALMOST TOO COOL TO HATE.

OUR FALLOW YEARS OF FOLLOWING THINGS UNFORTUNATLY COINCIDED WITH SOME OF THE BOCK'S PEAK YEARS, WE DID SEE HIS FIRST "ERA" CHALLENGING GAGNE AND THEN TAGTEAMING WITH RAY STEVENS, AND WERE BACK FOR HIS LAST COUPLE OF YEARS OF HIS FIRST SINGLE'S TITLE REIGN. IN-BETWEEN, BOCKWINKLE WON THE TITLE, BEGAN A LONG ASSOCIATION WITH MANAGER BOBBY HEENAN (AN EFFECTIVE PAIRING IF NOT LOGICAL: BOCK HARDLY NEEDED SOMEONE TO DO HIS TALKING), BROKE-UP, FEUDED AND RETEAMED WITH STEVENS AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, EXPANDED THE EXPOSURE OF THE AWA TITLE WITH INCREASING APPEARANCES IN "OTHER" TERRITORIES (THE HIGH REGARD PROMOTERS LIKE HOUSTON'S PAUL BOESCH HAD FOR BOCK WAS TYPICAL OF HIS EFFECTIVNESS AS CHAMP)

IN THE RING BOCKWINKLE'S STYLE MIGHT OFTEN SEEMED UNEXCITING. HE CAME OFF MOREAS "DEFENSIVE" BY WORKING HIS MATCHES WITH ACCOMPLISHED SELLING THAT GOT HIS OPPONENTS OVER AS SOMETHING BETTER THAN THEY OFTEN WERE. AT OUR FIRST CARD AFTER SEVERAL YEARS IN 1978 OR SO, WE SAW BOCK DEFEND AGAINST GREG GAGNE. IT WAS AN EXCELLANT MATCH, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME "REALIZED" HOW GOOD GAGNE WAS. WE UNDERSTAND THINGS BETTER NOW, NOT TO TAKE ANYTHING AWAY FROM GREGGIE, WHO WAS NOT WITHOUT ABILITY, THAT IT HAS MORE TO DO WITH THE CHAMP WHEN THE CHALLENGER LOOKS TO BE THE BETTER MAN.

BOCKWINKLE'S ONLY FAILING MAY HAVE BEEN BEING TOO GOOD FOR TOO LONG. WHEN HE FINALLY DROPPED THE TITLE IN '84, THE AWA HAD JUST HAD THEIR PEAK AND WERE ABOUT TO GET FLATTENED BY THE WHIFF STEAMROLLER. WHEN HEENAN LEFT THE AWA IN SEPT. OF 84, THEY PROBABLY LOST ANY CHANCE OF TURNING BOCK TO AN EFFECTIVE BABYFACE. A TURN WAS STILL TO BE DONE BUT KEPT BEING DELAYED. WHEN FINALLY ENACTED IN '86 OR '87, IT NEVER REALLY GOT OVER. BOCKWINKLE'S ACTIVE CAREER JUST SORTA RAN ITSELF OUT, AS HIS PHILOSOPHY OF RETIREMENT WAS "WHY CALL ATTENTION OR MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF DOING NOTHING?" BUT AT ALL TIMES, HIS "ACT" OF THE INTELLIGENT, SUPERIOR CLASS INDIVIDUAL WAS NO WORK.

WE DID NOT LOSE TRACK COMPLETLY HOWEVER, DURING THOSE "LOST" YEARS, AND TO THE EXTENT WE CONTINUED OUR INANE AVOCATION, IT COVERED EXPANDING HORIZONS. MONDO WENT VIDEO IN 1977 WHICH BROUGHT THE OCCASIONAL TAPE TRADE FROM OTHER CIRCUTS (USUALLY TEXAS) YIELDING A FEW BRIEF HOURS OF SUBLIME SILLINESS.

AND THEN OUR WORLD CHANGED, ON THE LAST DAY OF 197 WHEN WE FINALLY GOT MONDO CABLE TV, THE ANSWER TO A LIFELONG DREAM. SUDDENLY THERE WERE HOURS A WEEK O ALL VARIETIES FOR THE WRESTLING PLUCKING, FROM THE WONDERFUL (GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING) TO THE WOEFUL (ANYONE RECALL LARS ANDERSON'S "WORLD LEAGUE WRESTLIN ON THE SPN CHANNEL?) AS IMPORTANTLY, THE LOCAL GOT BETT

IN THE SPRING OF '79, TWO OF OUR LOCAL NETWORK AFFILLS DID A MUSICAL CHAIRS SWITCH WHICH SAW THE AWA SHOW MO TO A NOW NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATION WITH A MUCH MORE CON VIENENT SUNDAY 11:00 AM TIMESLOT. WE WERE NOW SUDDENLY FACED WITH REGULARITY THE INEXPLICABLE GENE OKERLAND WE'RE TELLING YOU, WE WERN'T QUITE SURE WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS GUY FOR THE LONGEST TIME; WE DIDN'T EVEN CATCH HIS NAME FO SEVERAL WEEKS - HE JUST APPEARED TO BE ANOTHER BALD HE IN THE GAGNE-KARBO-O'NEILL MOLD (EVER NOTICE?). BUT BEFORE LONG, OKERLAND'S PSEUDO-EXCITED, CONSUMATLY IN-

SINCERE CARNY-HUCKSTER PITCH GREW TO - BE AN ACQUIRED TASTE. BUT BY HIS IN-TERACTIONS WITH THE LIKES OF JESSE "TH BODY" VENTURA (WHO HUNG THE "MEAN GENE" MONIKER ON OKERLAND), HE WOUL PROVIDE SUFFICENT ENTERTAINMENT EVEN WHEN THE WRESTLERS COULD NO WITH OKERLAND, JERRY BLACKWELL, VEN-TURA & ADRIAN ADONIS AND, BY SUMMER 19 HULK HOGAN, THE AWA EMBARKED ON THEIR MOST SUCCESSFUL PERIOD EVER

WHAT A BOMBSHELL! YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING!!

RIGHT FROM THE START, BILLY ROBINSON HAS HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT ON OUR INTEREST IN PRO-RASSLIN. HIS SPECTACULAR STYLE WAS LIKE NOTHING WE HAD EVER SEEN BEFORE, AND IT BEGAN TO CHANGE HOW WE THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT WE WERE SEEING.

REMEMBER HIS AWA T.V. DEBUT? IT WAS ON (WE THINK) 6-19-71, IN A TV "SQUASH" AGAINST SHOZO "STRONG" KOBYASHI, WHO HIMSELF HAD BEEN PUSHED HARD ALL THAT YEAR. KOBY'S OPPONENT WAS INTRO'D WITH SOME NONDESCRIPT NAME LIKE "JOE SMITH" AND WE REMEMBER THINKING "THIS GUY LOOKS PRETTY GOOD FOR A LOSER". BUT SOMETHING WAS UP - KOBYASHI WAS ENTIRLY AGITATED, POINTING AT THE FIGURE ACROSS THE RING AND JABBERING AWAY, APPARENTLY LEARY. UNFORTUNATLY NO ONE ELSE REALLY UNDERSTOOD JAPANESE, SO THE PROTESTS WENT UNHEEDED. THE MATCH BEGAN, AND WE STARTED TO SEE MOVES AND COMBINATIONS AS NEVER BEFORE. AND WHILE WE DON'T RECALL THE SPECIFIC DETAILS, KOBYASHI WAS PINNED IN WHAT APPEARED TO BE AN AMAZING UPSET.

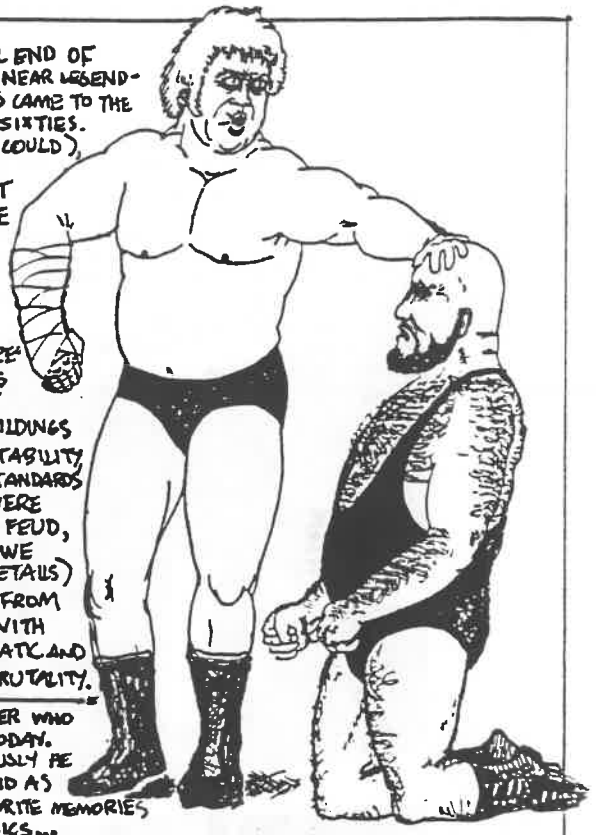
KOBYASHI AND HIS "MANAGER" THE BIG K (OUR HERO STAN KOWALSKI AGAIN) WERE ENRAGED, AND BEFORE THE SHOW WAS MUCH OLDER, THE GUY'S NAME WAS CORRECTED - BILLY ROBINSON - AND A LITTLE BACKROUND INFO GIVEN. IT EXPLAINED WHY KOBYASHI WAS AGITATED SO - HE KNEW ROBINSON WELL FROM SEEING HIM IN JAPAN. WAS THE WIN A FLUKE? THE HEELS CLAIMED IT WAS, CRYING "FOUL" AT THE UNANNOUNCED SURPRISE. TO PROVE IT, KOBYASHI WOULD WRESTLE ROBINSON AGAIN - THAT VERY NIGHT THEN WE WOULD SEE! AND SEE WE DID, WITH ROBINSON WINNIN CLEAN ONCE AGAIN, AND ESTABLISHED HIMSELF IMMEDIATLY AS A PHENOM OF THE HIGHEST RANK.

WITH AN INTRO LIKE THAT ONE HAD BETTER BE GOOD AND THIS ROBINSON WAS. IN WATCHING HIM, EVERY MATCH WAS A REVEALATION. WE OF COURSE AT THAT TIME HAD NOT A CLUE AS TO SUCH TERMS LIKE 'SHOOTING', 'WORKING', 'TIGHT' OR 'LOOSE' ETC. BUT FROM SEEING ROBINSON MOVE BEGAN OUR THINKING OF THESE CONCEPTS. HE MADE US REALIZE, IN WATCHING HIM DELIVER HIS STIFF FORE-ARM BLOWS, THAT SUCH "LEGAL" TYPE MOVES WERE ACTUALLY FAR MORE DESTRUCTIVE THAN MOST STYLIZED "ILLEGAL" CLOSED FIST SLUGGING. IN THIS WAY WE WERE BECOMING SUBTLY AWARE OF THOSE INNUMERABLE SHADES OF "REAL" OF WHICH 'RASSLIN CONSISTS.

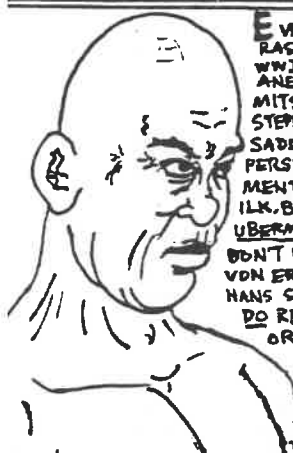
FOR THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS ROBINSON WAS ALWAYS THE BRIDESMAID, BUT NEVER ... AND FELL INTO THE ROUTINE OF GETTING ACED OUT BY SCREW-JOB FINISHES. GAGNE WAS CHAMP AT THIS TIME OF COURSE, AND NEVER PUT HIM OVER.

THE YEARS WE WERN'T FOLLOWING ROBINSON SAW HIM EVENTUALLY GO OUTSIDE OF THE AWA AND HIS SKILLS, OR AT LEAST THEIR APPLICATION, BEGIN TO ERRODE. HE EVEN PLAYED HEEL ON SOME CIRCUTS, AND SUCH AN ATTITUDE WAS, BY ALL REPORTS, MUCH CLOSER TO HIS ACTUAL PERSONALITY. WE NEVER REALLY CARED WHAT KIND OF ASSHOLE ROBBY PROBABLY WAS IN REAL LIFE, OR FOR WHAT REASONS HIS LAST ACTIVE YEARS IN THE EARLY 80'S WERE WITHOUT FOCUS OR REWARD; WE'RE JUST GRATEFUL HE CHOSE TO EMMIGRATE TO OUR PART OF THE U.S. WHEN HE DID AND INTRODUCE (AT LEAST INTRODUCE TO US) A STYLE OF WRESTLING AND A REPERTOIRE OF MOVES WHICH IS TODAY PRETTY STANDARD STUFF.

WHEN WE STARTED FOLLOWING THINGS AGAIN AROUND '79 WE CAUGHT THE TAIL END OF THE AWA TAG CHAMPS STINT OF RAY STEVENS AND PATTERSON. THEY WERE, ON PAPER, A NEAR LEGENDARY PAIR FROM TWO DECADES OF EITHER TEAMING OR FEUDING TOGETHER. STEVENS CAME TO THE AWA IN JULY OF 1971 AFTER OWNING NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SINCE THE EARLIEST SIXTIES. HE MAY NOT HAVE QUITE LIVED UP TO HIS VAUNTED REPUTATION (NO ONE PROBABLY COULD), BUT HE ALWAYS HAD OUR DEEPEST RESPECT & ADMIRATION FOR COMING ACROSS AS A LEGITIMATELY TOUGH INDIVIDUAL. PATTERSON, AS A VIRTUAL STEVENS CLONE BUILT A GREAT REP IN CALIFORNIA PRE-AWA, AND DREW RAVES FOR HIS STINTS IN THE NWF POST-AWA. HOW OR WHY WE HAVE NEVER UNDERSTOOD -- FROM WHAT WE EVER SAW OF HIM SUPREMELY UNDERWHELMED US. RAY AND PAT LOST THE TITLES TO THE HISTORIC (AND NEARLY PREHISTORIC) TEAM OF VERNE GAGNE AND MADDOG VACHON. NEVER MIND THEIR AGES OR THE QUESTIONABLE EGOISM OF GAGNE IN PUTTING HIMSELF OVER AT THIS STAGE OF THINGS ('SPECIALLY SINCE HE HAD HIMSELF WIN THE SINGLES TITLE THE NEXT YEAR ('80) JUST SO HE COULD "RETIRE" GOING OUT AS CHAMP), IT WAS, ALL CONSIDERED, A GREAT FEUD. ONE REASON WAS THE INTANGIBLE MAGIC OF THE GAGNE-VACHON TEAM HAD FOR THAT TRADITIONALIST CROWD THAT GREW UP OR ALONG WITH THEIR CAREER LONG FEUD. LIKE OLD BUILDINGS AND PROSTITUTES, HEEL WRESTLERS AFTER ENOUGH YEARS GAIN A CERTAIN RESPECTABILITY, AND THE FANS WERE ALL READY TO EMBRACE VACHON. AND TO OUR UNDEMANDING STANDARDS OF THOSE DAYS, VACHON'S WILD BRAWLING AND GAGNE'S TECHNICAL EXPERTISE WERE ENTIRELY ENTERTAINING... ANOTHER REASON WAS AN ANGLE INVOLVED IN THIS FEUD, ONE OF OUR FAVORITE MEMORABLE MOMENTS: IN A FILM CLIP FROM THE ARENA WE HAVE VACHON IN THE RING (SORRY, WE DONT REMEMBER ALOT OF THE SET-UP DETAILS) WHEN STEVENS (WHO, DUE TO AN INJURY NO DOUBT, WAS WEARING PLASTER FROM FIST TO ELBOW ON HIS BUSINESS ARM) COLD-COCKS THE DOG AND PROCEEDS, WITH DIABOLICAL DELIBERATION, TO DELIVER TWENTY OR MORE VERY REALISTIC, DRAMATIC AND BELIEVABLE SMASHES TO THE NEAR COMATOSE VACHON'S FOREHEAD. BEAUTIFUL BRUTALITY.



A FEW MORE WORDS ON MADDOG VACHON IF WE MAY... HE WAS AN AMAZING PERFORMER WHO WORKED OUR AREA FOR TWENTY-SOME YEARS WITH VILLAINOUS WAYS LIKE NOTHING SEEN TODAY. BACK THEN BADGUYS WERE BADGUYS WITH NO CROWD AMBIGUITY AS TO HATRED. OBVIOUSLY HE WAS EFFECTIVE ENOUGH TO USED AS THE AWA SINGLES CHAMP (IN THE MID SIXTIES) AND AS TAG CHAMP (WITH BROTHER BUTCHER FROM '69 TO '71) AFTER THAT. ONE OF OUR FAVORITE MEMORIES IS OF A TIME WHEN THE DOG HEARD THE CROWD CHEERS, LONG BEFORE HIS LATE 70'S HEROICS... PERENNIAL TAG TEAMER "PRETTY BOY" LARRY HENNIG WAS TEAMING WITH "LARS ANDERSON" (LARRY HEINIEMI, OF COURSE) DURING 1970, AND EVEN THOUGH THE BABYFACE TAG TEAMS LIKE RED BASTIEN AND BILLY "RED" LYONS (OR LATER, PEPPER GOMEZ), THE CRUSHER AND ALMOST ANY BODY, ETC. GOT MOST OF THE SHOTS VERSUS THE VACHONS, LARRY AND LARS FINALLY GOT A MINNEAPOLIS TITLE SHOT ON 9-12-70 AND WERE SO OVER AS HEELS THAT, BY DEFAULT WE SUPPOSE, THE CROWD SOLIDLY CHEERED THE CHAMPS. QUITE A SIGHT, AND WE RELISH THE MEMORY OF MADDOG'S LOOK OF GENUINE BEWILDERMENT AT THE RECEPTION. FORTUNATLY THIS DIDN'T TEMPER HIS TRADEMARK BARBARITY AS THE MATCH FINISHED WITH A DDG MELEE'.



EVEN INTO THE 1980'S, PRO RASSLIN' WAS STILL FIGHTING WWII AGAINST DEVIOUS JAPANESE (LIKE THE MENTIONED MITSU ARAKAWA) AND GOOSE-STEPPING GERMAN NAZIS (AND SADLY, THE SICKO ARCHETYPES PERSISTED INTO THE 80'S). WE'VE MENTIONED THOSE OF THE ORIENT ILK, BUT OUR MEMORIES OF NAZI UBERMENSCH ARE FEW SINCE WE DON'T RECALL MUCH OF THE FRITZ VON ERICHS, OTTO VON KRUPPS OR HANS SCHMIDTS OF THOSE DAYS. WE DO RECALL HOWEVER, CIRCA 1966 OR SO, AN OCCASIONAL TV INTERVIEW WITH THIS TALL, GRINNING, BALDING (BUT PRE-SHAVE JOB), BUDDING, NOT-SO-YOUNG GAGNE PROTEGE STILL IN TRAINING BY THE NAME OF JIM RASCHKE. WASN'T HE SOME ACCOMPLISHED AMATEUR OLYMPIAN REAL WRESTLER OR SOMETHING? NAWW - CAN'T BE, SINCE THE NEXT TIME WE SAW HIM, IN A MAG 'BOUT '67 OR '68, HE WAS REALLY BARON VON RASCHKE, WITH AUTHENTIC MONOCLE, SKIN HEAD, AND PERPENDICULAR EARS. INTO THE EARLY '70'S HE SEEMED TO WORK EVERYWHERE BUT THE AWA AND BY THE TIME HE HID BOOK OUT OF HERE (1974 OR SO, OFTEN TEAMED WITH GENUINE GERMAN HORST HOFFMAN BEING AN ALL-SUITED HEEL) WE WERE EVERYWHERE ELSE. WE WATCHED HIM ONLY FROM AFAR, AND WHENEVER WE SAW HIM (GEORGIA CABLE, OLD AWA CLIPS ETC.), WE WERE IMPRESSED BY HIS GOOD SIZE, HARD WORK, AND APPARENT TOUGHNESS. HE WAS ONE OF THOSE GUYS WITH "TENDON STRENGTH" AS GORDON SOLIE WOULD SAY (SINCE LORD KNOWS HE'S NEVER BEEN ACCUSSED OF BEING MUSCLE-BOUND), HIS LAST GOOD FLING WAS HERE IN MONDO - AND WHEN BROUGHT IN EARLY IN '81 AS THE SURPRISE AVENGER TO EXACT RETRIBUTION FROM JERRY BLACKWELL / JOHN STUDD FOR INJURIES INFLICTED ON MENTOR MADDOG VACHON. IT WAS FUN TO SEE HIMSELF AS CULT HERO "CLAW MASTER" B.V.R.

FOR SOME THINGS, MERE WORDS SEEM INSUFFICIENT

IN THE "POST-HULK" ERA AWA (ANYTIME AFTER '83), OUR "MEMORABLE MOMENTS" ARE GENERALLY NON-EXISTENT --

WITH ONE EXCEPTIONAL EXCEPTION...

OUR AWE FOR THE DOUBLE B HAS BEEN WELL CHRONICLED, AND BRINGING HIM IN TO WEAVE HIS SPELL ENABLED US TO ONCE AGAIN BECOME, IF NOT "TRUE BELIEVERS", THEN AT LEAST UNCRITICAL "FANS".

IT WAS A SHORT BUT CLASSIC TENURE:

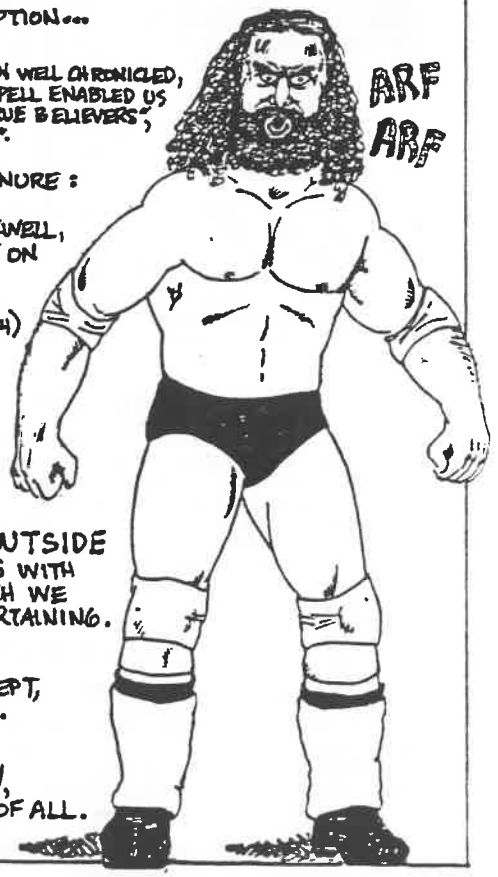
CAME IN TO FEUD WITH JERRY BLACKWELL, WHO TURNED BABY IN BRODY'S DEBUT ON THE STRENGTH OF BB'S SAVAGE, UNRELENTING ATTACK AFTER A BLACKWELL BATTLE ROYAL WIN (6-10-84)

SEVERAL ENCOUNTERS FOLLOWED, ESPECIALLY THEIR "LIGHTS OUT" MATCH IN ST. PAUL (10-21-84) IT WAS ALMOST AS GOOD AS PROMISED...

BRODY'S BIGGEST BATTLES WERE OUTSIDE THE RING BY CONSTANT CLASHES WITH THE GAGNE MANAGEMENT, WHICH WE FOUND TO BE EVERY BIT AS ENTERTAINING.

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER EXCEPT, PERHAPS, ONE'S MEMORIES...

AND IN BRUISER BRODY, WE'VE THE VERY BEST ONES OF ALL.



BEST OF
MICK KARCH'S
"LEAN MEAN MACHINE" BULLETIN

From 1971 to 1987 Mick Karch published a newsletter entitled "The Lean Mean Machine" as part of his Nick Bockwinkel fan club. In those newsletters, Mick talked about the entire wrestling scene as seen through his eyes. The following excerpts from the last eight years he published "Lean Mean Machine" should reveal exactly what "seeing through Mick's eyes" is like...

MAD DOG VACHON cho,ping on Jesse Ventura's foot: 1979 (Photo by Joyce Paustian courtesy Mick Karch)

(WINTER 79)

THE REAL EIGHTH WONDER OF THE WORLD

I have been dared by someone who shall remain nameless to make mention of Lord Alfred Hayes' navel. Many of you are denied the pleasure of witnessing such a spectacle due to the fact that his Lordship often times wears the full tunic top in the ring. But for those of us who have had, as luck would have it, a brief glance in the general direction of his belly-button, we are convinced that it, not Andre the Giant, is the "Eighth Wonder of the World."

THE REAL FUTURE SUPERSTAR?

I hate to keep bringing up the Atlanta TBS show, but Austin Idol is perhaps the most dazzling grappler around. There are several of the Idol-ilk, such as Superstar Graham, Jesse Ventura, Hulk Hogan, etc., but for sheer excitement and sensational interviews, Idol is dynamic. In my opinion, he outclasses all of the aforementioned.

PERFECTLY YOUNG

Heard that Larry "The Axe" Hennig is teaming with his son, Curt, out in the Pacific Northwest. I hope that he is in better shape than he was the night he wrestled Adrian Adonis in St. Paul. The Axe has been out of wrestling for a while when he took to the squared circle with the Golden Boy, and it showed in his enormous paunch. The bout was set for a 10-minute time limit, mercifully, because Hennig looked like he was headed for that big arena in the sky at any minute. As it was, he relied on Curt to bail him out. [LMM '82]

SINCERELY, SCARPELLO

I am still waiting for Joe Scarpello to send me a photograph of himself in the Olympics. Not that I particularly want one, you understand, but a few years back, I showed Joe some old programs from his glory days in Minneapolis when he was teaming with Verne Gagne. He was so ecstatic over the programs that he asked me to xerox them, send them to his Omaha address, and he would be happy to send me a wonderful autographed picture of himself.

EDITORIAL: FAN VIOLENCE

An article appeared recently in the Minneapolis Star and Tribune concerning the stabbing of wrestler, Roddy Piper. Roddy, one of the notorious "baddies" in professional wrestling, was attacked down South.

This incident, unfortunately, is not new to pro wrestling. Stabbing incidents have taken place all over the country in arenas coast to coast. I witnessed one such event in Minneapolis, wherein Bobby Heenan was grazed by a fan wielding a pen knife. An off-duty Minneapolis policeman was once the victim of a stabbing during a melee at ringside. Sorry to say, then, that the beast has readied its ugly head before, and even worse, probably will in the future.

What brings on such rabid behavior? It is obvious, I guess, that wrestling's very nature is uninhibited, wild, bizarre, and at the very least, unpredictable. Its fans tend to be a bit more rowdy, prone to pugnacity, profanity, and the bottom line: violence. I do not mean to suggest that just because someone is on a lower economic scale that they will automatically be violent, but wrestling fans have been characteristically that way, as studies have indicated over the years. They let their hair down in ways that no other sports fans do.

How would a fan justify extreme actions? No other sport in the world has such a share of chair-swinging, double-teaming, foreign objects, etc, to say nothing of sensational matches like lumberjack matches, lights-out matches, cage matches, death matches, and others of that realm. Wrestlers on the TV screen are among the most charismatic of any athletes, anywhere, whose words and deeds plant seething resentment or any undying devotion in the hearts of the fans.

When these fans buy their tickets, they let it loose in rather unorthodox ways, as anyone who has ever attended a bout knows. Sitting in a wrestling crowd is like sitting at a window to the world, with all types, sizes, shapes, and intellects gathered in one building to voice their approval or disapproval, delight or disgust.

But the heart of the issue is the violence. Most fans will rant and rave, but will call it quits short of physical violence. But the fringe element, looped on beer or Chicago's hard liquor, know no limitations. They become animalistic.

Stabbings are not the only form of violence. The wrestlers are punched and spit at, and have eggs, paper clips, ice cubes, flash bulbs, and beer tossed at them all the time. Just taking pictures at ringside, I have ducked flying objects of every sort, including a whiskey bottle. The question, then, is basic: Does wrestling's nature as a hell-raiser give someone license to attack a wrestler physically? Is the fan given a "green light" because the mat stars can work him to a fever pitch?

Of course not. Never in a million years. Security should be beefed up; people should not just be thrown out for hysterical behavior, they should be arrested.

A BUDDING BUDDY ROSE

Having seen old pal Playboy Buddy Rose on New Yrok television, the first observation is that Mr. Rose has gained an awful lot of weight over the past couple of years. It must have been all the Velveeta Cheese he ate at my house. Aside from that, he is impressive, to say the least, and was at Madison Square Garden August 30th. Win, lose, or draw, it is yet another tremendous achievement for Mr. Rose. Back in the early 70's, there was nothing that he wanted more in the world than to become a pro wrestler. Nothing. And he took a heap of physical punishment and rejection before he attained that goal. I predicted in one of the very early editions of this bulletin that he would win a major championship someday and already he has had numerous regional titles with the World's belt as yet out of his reach.

VERNE'S FIRST COMEBACK

Verne Gagne came out of retirement at the St. Paul Civic Center August 8th, teaming with Mad Dog Vachon against Jerry Blackwell and The Sheik. Eighteen thousand fans jammed the building, and I want to tell you, they were not disappointed. Unquestionably the most one-sided tag team main event I have ever seen. Jerry and Sheik had virtually no offensive the entire match as Verne and the Dog hammered them from pillar to post. Bottom line here is that Verne looked better than he has in years. He was very active in the match, throwing dropkicks and so forth, and had the crowd in an uproar. The ovation that he received was absolutely deafening. Say what you will about Verne Gagne; he is 56 years old and at least in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, he is magic to the fans.

WHOLLY COW, BATMAN!

Rare and screwy: a bat (the winged type) found its way to the St. Paul Civic Center for the above mentioned card. It soared through the building at high and low levels, while the crowd shrieked and ducked. Soon, however, hundreds of people were throwing things at the bat: pop glasses, programs, popcorn boxes, flash bulbs, you name it. You would have thought it was New Year's Eve. Finally, someone nailed it with a crumpled-up box, stomped it when it floated down to floor level, and then basked in the cheers of a relieved crowd. While all the throwing of objects was taking place, I managed to get hit in the ear with something - who knows what - that whistled in at about 100 miles an hour. What a night.

THAT SILLY GUY, PATTERSON

Recalling the night that a group of wrestlers happened upon a movie theater in Minneapolis to watch the Sylvester Stallone film, "Paradise Alley." The great Pat Patterson, who had just broken into pro wrestling, was in the middle. At a very tender moment on the screen, Patterson broke out in a mock crying spell, calling out Evans' name.

AFTER ALL, THIS IS BOCKWINKEL'S BULLETIN

Nick Bockwinkel continues to be an absolutely remarkable physcial specimen. We are all getting a little older, but I would give my eye and teeth to be in the shape that the Bock is in. After so many years in wrestling, so many thousands of matches and millions of travelled miles, the Bock shows no signs of slowing down, maintains the same incredible and hectic schedule that has characterized his reign as World Heavyweight Champion, and just plain continues to dominate the sport. There is no way we could ever support a finer wrestler and a better credit to the sport than we now do in our honorary. And I know that Nick agrees with all these flattering words, of course.

DEALING WITH A FAN

As many of you know, I wrote a regular wrestling column for that "paper," The Daily American, until they owed me for several articles and never came across with any money.

At any rate, this Joe Longstreet character wrote for them before I did. He is the guy who threatened to shave his head until Verne Gagne would agree to wrestle Billy Robinson, and said that he was going to try to get the Supreme Court to force the match! Get the picture? He was one peel short of a full banana.

So, one week this character reads some negative comments I make about Billy Robinson and decides to write a letter accusing me of getting Robinson so angered he challenged me to get into the ring. It was actually our own Nasty Neal Gale. So, I proceeded to call Longstreet and rake him over the coals, up one side and down the other, telling him that he better get all of his facts straight before writing accusations. As a result of that phone call, he wrote a second letter apologizing for accusing me of knocking Robinson.

Incidently, screwy as it may sound, he and I eventually patched things up and I made him an honorary v.p. in the Bockwinkel Brigade. That unforgivable error was thrown in my face when the idiot expressed delight that Nick and Ray Stevens had lost the tag team belts to Crusher and Robinson. Dealing with him is one facet of my wrestling-related career that can be chalked up as moronic. I still see him now and then. Robinson is not the champion and Longstreet has hair on his head.

THIS GUY IS SADISTIC, DEPT.

It was Nick Bockwinkel calling, informing me that he would not be a able to adhere to previous plans to hold the Brigade convention August 7th and 8th. In what was obviously a sincere expression of sympathy, Mr. Bockwinkel said, "You know how bad I feel that you worked so hard putting this together and now you will look like a fool," and then he laughed uproariously.

(SUMMER OF '82)

IT'S ENOUGH TO GIVE SOMEONE NIGHTMARES

You know, life acts in strange ways. Many years back, a wrestling fan by the name of Al Lopez was involved in some rather shady dealings. He would promise to send out material to unsuspecting fans, take the money, and send nothing. George Shire, Jim Melby, and I had various unpleasant dealings with him to the point that he actually would verbally threaten us. I do not think any of us actually met him face to face and never really wanted to, come to think of it.

Anyway, as things turned out, the same Alan Lopez was accused of murdering his sister, mother, and father just a few months back. And now word has come out that he took his own life in a jail cell in Minnesota.

It is enough to give somebody nightmares.

IT'S GREAT TO HAVE WRESTLERS AS FRIENDS

Leave it to Playboy Buddy Rose. The years have not changed any of his nocturnal habits. A couple months back, on a short stint in Minneapolis, he called me to invite me to his motel room to watch some video tapes of him in action. Only catch was that I would have to meet him at 3:00 in the morning on a work night. I graciously declined. This was in keeping with the Playboy's normal style, though. He has had a tendency on occassion to place long-distance phone calls from the West Coast at 4:00, 5:00 a.m. and then ask, "Weren't you up yet?"

BOCK TALKS TO JOCKS

Hard to believe that it has been ten years since Nick spoke at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, dazzling the students with his mastery of the situation, regardless of how some of the jocks tried to pressure him on a variety of subjects. It was Nick at his finest. When it was all over, he was mobbed for handshakes, autographs, and pictures. You would have almost thought it was a Brigade convention.

SQUASH, ANYONE?

Grab your hat and coat, timmies. We've reserved you hospital room because after you get through reading our infamous compilation of TV Loser Ratings, you will need a little R & R. With as little respect as possible, let us now take a quick, sideways glance at those wrestlers to whom we extend out condolences: the losers. Eight of the finest...

1) JAKE MILLIMAN: What a surprise! I mean to say, this is a real stunner, folks. The guy who looks like he was put together with a set of Tinker Toys has actually climbed to the top of these ratings. The last couple of times I have seen him on TV, he has fallen head-first to the mat from the second rope and then Ken Patera tossed him through the air like a sack of feathers. Just for maintaining a semblance of vital signs, he is our new top quack.

2) TOM STONE: For sheer wrestling ability (so sheer, you can see right through the guy), Tom Stone is the best of the bunch. Call him Tom, call him "Rocky," but don't call him late for dinner, this Dairy State native is making a real mark on pro wrestling. He's leaving blood stains wherever he appears. Purely for the respect that I know he has for Nick, he is number two with a bullet.

3) HERMAN SCHAEFFER: I read where a group of anthropologists are planning a long excursion though that mysterious hideous fold of belly mass that Mr. Schaeffer unashamedly bares to the world. They are convinced that somewhere in among the highways and biways of that tract of tissue there must be some form of life. They have not found any other parts of Herman's body as yet.

NICK BOCKWINKEL

STAN HANSEN piledrives RICK MARTEL in their feud over the AWA World Heavyweight Title: 1985. (Photo by Mick Karch)

4) KENNY JAY: I have been watching Kenny Jay for twenty years and I still cannot figure out whether or not he speaks English. I have heard him at ringside, from close range, and amid all his wailing and shrieking. I have tried desperately to understand him, to piece something together, to see if he is trying to say something. But the mat world would not be the same without this guy and it is nice to have him to kick around.

5) SONNY ROGERS: The Sun Man, Mr. Golden Hair Surprise, the guy whose ring jacket is far more colorful than he will ever hope to be, continues on a trek that is snowballing him into oblivion. I will not deny that the guy has good moves - don't get me wrong. He is fast, shifty, and full of tricks. It is IN the ring that he runs into trouble.

6) TORPEDO GUZMAN: Let's be honest about him. I cannot stand him now and I could not stand him ten years ago. I do not particularly care for that goatee, either. It has annoyed me ever since I first laid eyes on him. Of life's many little blessings, one of the sweetest is that he will never be the World Heavyweight Champion.

7) ANGUS McLAIN: I have absolutely nothing to say about Angus. Primarily because I am running out of room for this article but more importantly, what can you say about a guy who may or may not be the only walking ball of twine in existence?

8) WOODY WILSON: I detested Woodrow when I first saw him; now I get a kick out of him. His physique is best described as "confusing." He tries so damn hard, too. He goes the rough route; he goes the clean route; he does this, he does that, and occassionally, he even does the other thing. Any yet, when he makes his appearance from behind the curtain at the TV studios, the fans in attendace emit a collective belch.

IT'S NOT EASY BEING A BOCKWINKEL FAN

Back in the early days, when I was a bit more daring, I wore a "Bockwinkel Brigade" tee-shirt to matches in Green Bay and Milwaukee. The crowd in Green Bay was more verbal than that in Milwaukee, hollering vulgarities and obscenities the minute they saw the shirt. It took the Milwaukee fans a little bit longer; and when Nick was involved in a more-than-controversial decision on the card, I left the arena with my arms folded over my chest.

I may be an idiot... but I do not have a death wish.

And then there was the night in Cambridge, Minnesota, when a group of us cheered Nick against the hapless Bull Bullinski. We were literally chased out of the town by a band of rowdies in pick-up trucks.

Small wonder that Cambridge is the home of a state mental institution.

The memories continue: Nick's first lasting impression on the AWA was when he wrestled Bullinski in a TV match and just about deflated Bullinski's gut with a jump off the top rope. It was to be the beginning of a history-making stint in AWA-land for Nick and really was the first stumble down the ladder for Bullinski who never did much after that.

ALL-STAR WRESTLING MEMORIES

This is going to be fun. All-Star Wrestling has been a part of my life for 23 years now. Whatever schedule changes have bounced it from time slot to time slot on the tube, I have been as loyal as the family dog through these many years. What I will do now is bring back some of the those memories, all of them vivid, that have stuck with me from the ASW TV shows.

Hans Schmidt, a German wrestler, is terrorizing Minneapolis. He battles popular Frank Townsend, a strapping, handsome grappler who also is a recording artist. As the time limited expires on TV, Townsend grabs the microphone and stuns the placid Minneapolis air-waves by shouting, "give me five more minutes...goddamnit, I can beat this guy!"... In a subsequent rematch at the Minneapolis Auditorium, Schmidt pinned Townsend.

Mitsu Arakawa attacks Verne Gagne from ringside during Verne's bout with preliminary wrestler, "The Great Dane," karate-chopping Verne's throat and forcing cancellation of a Gagne-Arakawa title bout set for later on the same evening.

The Crusher, in the days when he was not such a fan favorite, clobbers Gagne from behind with a bottle of liquid vitamin, Gera-Lac; he takes a swig and spits it on Verne's outstretched form, causing a near riot.

Crusher and Mad Dog Vachon are involved in a studio altercation which ends up with the Dog suffering a 23-stitch head wound.

Hercules Cortez and Crusher become embroiled in a quick battle which culminates in the late Spanish strongman depositing Crusher's head completely through am interview backdrop.

Texas Bob Geigel picks up a midget wrestler who was being interviewed, tosses him 20 feet through the air, over the top rope, into the ring! The midget looked like a guided missile as he soared through the studio.

Doug Gilbert pulls the mask off Mysterious Mr. M (Dr. Bill Miller), who scurries to safety with the help of Bob Geigel.

Super Destroyer Mark II delivered perhaps the most brutal blow I have ever seen in wrestling when he wielded a steel folding chair like a baseball bat and hit Larry Hennig directly in the face.

Lars Anderson becomes so worked up in a television interview that he suddenly tears his own shirt completely off his body and storms into the ring, ranting and raving at everyone in sight.

Guy Taylor, a preliminary wrestler, dies shortly after a televised bout with Dr. X. Cause of death was listed as heart trouble.

The Crusher leads the audience in a parade around the studio after the Minnesota Twins won their only American League Championship.

Tiny Mills, then known as the "King of Lumberjacks," and one-half of the World Tag Team Championships with Stan Kowalski, hits 300-pound Man Mountain Campbell over the head with a hammer as Campbell is being interviewed! Campbell eventually wrestled as "Luke Brown."

Verne Gagne pinned a relative newcomer to professional wrestling circles who amused the crowd with his appearance but demonstrated the makings of a brutal, antagonistic wrestler. His name - Harley Race.

And so the memories are being made every day, up to and including the recent Adonis-Ventura suspension. There's no doubt about it, there is nothing to match the wrestling excitement when it peaks on television.

While we are bringing back some of the more memorable events on the Brigade's first decade-plus, how can we forget to include Grandpa Nick DeGidio. Many of you who have followed wrestling for years will remember him, an elderly guy who always sat in the front row at the WTCN studios for the televised matches, often wearing a "Dr. X" tee-shirt.

Grandpa Nick was the "official cheerleader," letting the villains of the ring have it with both barrels. But he was a lovable old guy; he knew we were fans of those he did not care for and we playfully exchanged verbal barbs during the studio tapings. He supplied us with tickets on a weekly basis, spending hours on end talking wrestling before the tapings began.

One afternoon, Grandpa Nick slipped into unconsciousness at the studio during one of the commercials and was rushed to the hospital where he died of heart failure a week later. Truly one of the real characters - that was Nick DeGidio.

LIVING UP TO EXPECTATIONS

I think that in all the years I have been watching wrestling, the boys with the most hype that turned out to be the biggest disappointments have been Jimmy Valiant, Boris Breznikoff, Pierre Poison, and Pedro Morales. All were highly-touted and did virtually nothing in the AWA.

On the other hand, Buddy Wolfe, Roger "Nature Boy" Kirby, and Bob Orton Jr. have been the wrestlers that really left too soon. All had great ability and were exciting to watch.

INCREDIBLE: A COOL REFEREE

As I am gazing back at the past eleven years, one fellow comes to mind that really brightened our early days as

Brigaders back at the WTCN-TV studios. The late Chuck Svenson was not only a gifted referee, one of the best that I have ever seen in the AWA, but he always chatted with us both outside the ring and from the ring apron. For a while, we teased him about a small hole he had in his referee's shirt; he loved it. And he always took our ribbing in style, claiming that his shortcomings as an official were due to the fact that he was "blind in one eye and can't see out of the other one." He was a kind, friendly, decent man, and wrestling certainly lost a quality individual when Chuck passed away far too prematurely.

RUN, DON'T WALK, FANS

Let's make mention of Marty O'Neil, too. Mr. Wrestling. There has not ever been a TV wrestling announcer that could hold a candle to Marty, who always brought out the utmost in the wrestler's personality. Another guy who always loved to chat, a sports enthusiast and walking encyclopedia, Marty still has his hands dabbling in promotion in the St. Paul area, though he does not grace the tube anymore due to various cardio-vascular difficlties. Wrestling and Marty O'Neil went together hand-in-glove here in the Twin Cities. Only Marty would have had the audacity to tell fans to "change their plans" if they were planning anything other than attending the pro wrestling matches.

LARRYLAND VERSUS PIPER'S PIT

I thoroughly enjoy the ESPN cablecast of "AWA Championship Wrestling," but most of all, Larry Zbyszko's "In This Corner" segment is sensational. Larry Z has that sarcasm we have come to appreciate from Mr. Bockwinkel, only he spices it with a beautiful rudeness and arrogance that Brigaders can really appreciate. And how glorious Stan Hansen was in his interview, wheeling around and hitting announcer Larry Nelson, even popping Larry Z right off his chair. It is better than Piper's Pit by a long-shot, because as entertaining as Piper is, he can grate on you really fast. And Larry Z also has a degree of self-control and does not ramble on.

(SUMMER 83)

GEIGEL FOR PRESIDENT

Watching the cable show out of Atlanta, it was a pleasure to see Texas Bob Geigel on the air. Geigel was one of the first wrestlers I saw as a youngster. As a matter of fact, I remember Bob threatening to "squash like a grape," the head of Marty O'Neil, if Texas found one speck of dust on his cowboy hat after his televised matches.

And now he heads up the NWA.

THE MILKMAN HAS ALWAYS DELIVERED

I don't know about you, but I have become a devout Jake Milliman fan. This guy has been tossed around so far, so many times, that he is starting to look like a Frisbee with a beard. His recent television match with Nick culminated in Jake falling pinpoint on his head.

PRO WRESTLING: LEAD STORY IN SPORTS

It is amazing how the local news media in Minneapolis-St. Paul has jumped on the wrestling bandwagon ever since attendance was booming. As a matter of fact, at the Civic Center card that drew 19,000 and then the addtional 9,000 for closed circuit TV, wrestling was the LEAD sports story on three channels.

NICK BOCKWINKEL versus CURT HENNIG: 1987 (By Mick Karch)

AND SEVEN YEARS LATER...

Watching Andre the Giant wrestle Big John Studd on the tube recently, I can only thank my lucky stars that I am only subjected to Andre once or twice a year here in AWA territory. Honestly, I cannot think of too many wrestlers less agile or more boring.

RED BASTIEN and RAY STEVENS share a laugh: 1988 (By Mick Karch)

HARLEY SURPASSES THE AXE IN THE RACE

It does not seem possible, but it is already 20 years since Larry Hennig and Harley Race formed their devastating tag team combination. In the years that have passed, it is Harley who has attained the greater success in the squared circle, winning the NWA Title seven times. That is an interesting turnabout, considering that when they were a tag team combination, it was Hennig who was generally considered the team leader and the strongest link in the chain.

(SPRING 84)

Though the Hulk has departed the AWA scene, it did not take long for the man from Milwaukee to recapture the hearts of fans here. Crusher's last bout with Jerry Blackwell at the St. Paul Civic Center drew 17,000 fans, and their next collision has sellout written all over it. Give the devil his due, after all those many years in the business and a two-year layoff, The Crusher still whips 'em to a frenzy.

ODE TO A REFEREE

Back in the more notorius days of the Brigade, my cohorts and I did more than just antagonize wrestlers and officials. We wrote lyrics to songs and applied their lyrics to standard melodies. Below, is one example:

"REFEREE'S ANTHEM" - To the tune of the "Star Spangled Banner."

Oh, oh, say referee,
Don't you see those brass knucks?
I hate to say this, third man,
But your ref'ing really sucks!

This match is quite a brawl,
As I'm sure you'll agree,
It's the last job I'd want,
To be the ref-er-ee!

And how funny it seems,
That you can't hear my screams,
Of wild outrage,
When Bobby's locked in the cage!

With dropkicks and flying tackles,
And jumping off top ropes, too...
Crusher hit Nick with a chair!
Isn't that a DQ??

(WINTER 85)

SGT. MAGICIAN

Is it true that the always loveable Sgt. Slaughter also moonlights as "Bob the Magician?" At the Civic Center recently, George Shire and I asked the good Sarge if he might go into the lockerroom and get his "Most Popular Wrestler" plaque (presented at the ill-fated SuperVention banquet) so that we might pose for a photo with him. Mind you, at that moment, he was sans hat, sunglasses, or anything. "Sure," he said, "I'll be right back." No sooner did I turn around and face the other way, then I heard "where do ya wanna take it?" I did a 180 degree turn and there was the Sarge, sunglasses on, Marine hat on, battle fatigues, with plaque and American flag. The last time I moved that quickly was after I wolfed down two Zantigo cheese enchiladas and a Taco Burrito.

IRON MAN, YEAH RIGHT

I never cared for the rock group, "Black Sabbath" until The Roadies made a theme song of "Iron Man." One can get chills by those initial guitar chords before Animal and Hawk rumble ringward. I even went out and bought Black Sabbath's "greatest hits" album, just so I can turn "Iron Man" on full-blast on the stereo. Once, I even put on war paint ala The Roadies, and pulled off my shirt for emphasis. When my darling wife and one-year old son both laughed hysterically, I realized something wasn't just all right.

TV TAPINGS - THE OLD FASHIONED WAY

TV wrestling viewers know that for a short time, the "studio" matches of the AWA were held in larger arenas, as opposed to the small, intimate variety. Personally, I didn't much care for that larger setting, having grown up with the Calhoun Beach Manor matches, and then on to Boone Avenue, then to Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. Now it appears that the small studio format is back. As a long time fan, I say, "good," because there is something far more exciting, the action seems more intense, and the "hometown" atmosphere is back, as opposed to a larger arena setting that does not really captivate you as if it was your own. Follow me? Somewhere through all this mish-mosh, I'm trying to say, "welcome back," small studio format.

NICK BOCKWINKEL and fan club President, MICK KARCH having their usual good time.

COMMENTARY: WALLY KARBO

I want to take an opportunity to congratulate Wally Karbo, the Minneapolis promoter. Wally is now in his 50th year in the wrestling profession, having started as an office boy for the late Tony Stecher of the Wrestling Club, then refereeing tens of thousands of matches all over the world, then becoming a promoter. Wally has seen it all and done it all in wrestling. There are some fans who see Wally only as he appears on camera, sometimes in a state of disarray after a studio brawl, etc., and they are left with the impression that Wally is not always on top of things.

Let me tell you that Wally Karbo is a very intelligent, shrewd, and intense businessman who knows professional wrestling perhaps like no other promoter anywhere. Certainly, when you mention the very cream of the promotion crop, Wally is right up there, along with Houston's Paul Boesch or the former St. Louis promoter and NWA official, Sam Muchnick.

It was Wally who would give me pocketfuls of change for running publicity sheers from the Dyckman Hotel to the Minneapolis Star and Tribune back in the middle 60's. It was Wally who okayed my shooting ringside pictures in 1979. And most of all, through thick and thin, when things have looked a little shaky, it is Wally Karbo who has been an advocate of me and my efforts.

I thank him very much for all that he has done and continues to do for me. He is a compassionate, caring man who even refrains from taping potshots at the competition, even when their bullets fly over his head. The wrestling world has been fortunate to have Wally Karbo in their midst for all these years. And I, for one, appreciate him to the fullest.

RINGSIDERS REVISITED

Sit down, timmies. It is time once again to examine with great wonder and amazement some of those in attendance at recent Civic Center cards here in the Twin Cities.

Periodically, we write this feature as a public service for those who are down in the doldrums or in a state of depression. These characters who are described in this article are there for you to use as a "rule of thumb," so that even at those darkest hours when you feel the world is closing in on you, be aware that there are those worse off than yourself.

Our first stop is at the seat occupied by a profane blob of humanity that we shall refer to as "Fatso Foulmouth." He has got a front row ticket, and has been known to unleash as many as 3,217 vulgar comments in one evening.

Literally, no westler is safe when this jelly-belly gets in gear. He has no allegiance or loyalty to anyone. If he's bored with the match, he'll turn on a good guy just as fast as the worst villains of the ring. He has invented nicknames for the wrestlers that, while they are the height of profanity, are intriguing. He has suggested that the mat stars perform some sexual acts on themselves that I would pay a lot of bucks to see.

We have mentioned "Frank" before. Frank also has a front row, not too far from the aforementioned "Fatso." Frank claims to be in his seventies, but I know that is not true. I know for a fact that he was awarded a good citizenship medal by the President of the United States when he was eighteen. President Lincoln, I mean.

"Frank" is also notorious for obscenity, but in the form of hand signals. Rumor has it that his middle finger can bench-press 75 pounds! He has thrust his arms and fingers in so many different directions that helicopters have assumed he is directing them in and have landed on the Civic Center roof. They once had to call the paramedics in to untangle him after he became entwined in his own arms and legs in a moment of frenzy. I was jealous. I sometimes wish I had that kind of dexterity. A favorite target of Jesse The Body, "Frank" has more lines on his face than I do on my TV set. I am eagerly anticipating the day that one of the wrestlers plants a size 14 shoe in his rear end when he turns around and flashes his somewhat flat posterior towards the ring. Frank is a fixture - but then, so is a toilet seat.

I was amazed and quite frightened, actually, at a sight I saw during a recent main event. There at ringside, I glanced over and saw an enormous, dark cavern, with a seemingly endless maze of twists, turns, and obstacles on the inside! I thought that maybe the ring lights had been in my eyes too long and I was hallucinating. As it turned out, there is a young woman of rather large dimensions who sits ringside and has a habit of jumping up from her seat at peak moments of matches. When she does, her size 10 sweater can't contain her size 96 belly and her navel was exposed. I am talking terror, folks! Her belly-button looked like an ear Think about it!

And, in conclusion, due to popular demand, we make brief mention of Little Ricky, our midget madman. (Pardon the pun, "brief" mention.) Yes, the gum on the boot of life is still there, after all these years. It may be my imagination, but I think Rick has mellowed over the years. Now, he only aggravates me three or four times a night; it used to be dozens. That is neither here nor there; he still knows how to get under my skin. I have tried to convince him for years that after Bobby the Brain interferes in a main event and the 18,000 fans on hand are not exactly tossing roses at him and Nick, I don't need a pint-sized agitator pointing at me and yelling "that's the president of his fan club."

Some day I will put him in a toothpaste tube and squeeze him to the moon. ***

THE ANNUAL POTSHOTS GALLERY

THE ADVENTURES of MAGIC VINCE

AND THEN I INVENTED PRO WRESTLING AND WALT DISNEY TOLD ME--

IS SOMETHING WRONG, SIR?

THERE CERTAINLY IS!

HIM!

ME?

CNN

HUMBLE GRIP

THAT MAN IS WEARING A SHIRT THAT BEARS THE LOGO OF A NETWORK OWNED BY A MAN WHO, WHILE NOT A COMPETITOR, DOES GIVE ME THE RED-ASS...

I WANT THAT MAN STRIPED AND BEATEN!

THEN MAKE HIM EAT THAT SHIRT!

IT'S GOOD TO BE KING...

NEXT, I THINK I'LL GIVE DUSTY A NEW FINISHER--

THE SUPERFLY SPLASH OFF THE TOP ROPE! HAW!

AAAARGH!

TOMPD

& PUNCH!

RIP!

& THUD!

THE END

POTSHOT'S PUZZLERS

THANKS TO SCOTT DECKER!

IV WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE OLDER THAN DON OWEN?

1. THE GRAND CANYON
2. DIRT
3. BOB HOPE
4. BOBO BRAZIL
5. THE MOVE WHERE ONE WRESTLER GRABS AN OPPONENT BY THE FOOT, SPINS HIM AROUND AND DELIVERS AN ATOMIC DROP
6. NONE OF THE ABOVE

HOW JOO-MILIATING!

SADDEST MASK STORIES

EL OLYMPICO (CA. 1974)

VICTIM OF A NEW YORK STATE ANTI-HOOD LAW, HE WAS FORCED TO WORK IN A GLORIFIED BATHING CAP...

CAN YOU DRAW THIS WRESTLER!?

YOU COULD BE ON YOUR WAY TO A HIGH-PAYING JOB AS A WRESTLING CARTOONIST!

JOIN THE RANKS OF SUCH ILLUSTRATING JUGGERNAUTS AS:
- MR. MIKE
- POTSHOT
- RON TREELSTAD

JOIN THE FAMOUS WRESTLER CARTOONIST SCHOOL...

"I was going nowhere: a junior executive in a Fortune 500 company until I joined the FAMOUS WRESTLER CARTOONIST SCHOOL, BY GOD..."

-Robert "Buck" Renquist

Kenneth Angry HERE, WITH MY LATEST EXPOSE': "WRESTLING BABYLON"!

SEE PHOTOS OF TOMMY RICH "WINNING THE NWA TITLE"! ZYBYSKO'S PHOTOS OF RHODES AND THE SHOTS DINO BRAVO HAS OF VINCE THAT HAVE GUARANTEED HIM AN UNEARNED PUSH FOR HALF A DECADE!

THE JIMMY SNUKA DREAM DATE; CHRIS VON ERICH - 50 YEARS OF DEBAUCHERY IN A 15 YEAR OLD BODY; 20 FAMOUS WRESTLERS WHO GOT IN TROUBLE FOR PUBLIC URINATION! ALL THE DIRT, ALL THE SCANDALS!

"Better than the Rosecrucians!"

-Havly "Hive" Ackles

"I tried everything, from race car driving to Avon salesman, but I never felt fulfilled -- economically or spiritually -- until I tried wrestling cartooning."

-Fred Fondo

POTSHOT'S TAG TEAM PRO-FILES

TORCH PREDICTION
Starrcade '91
MAIN EVENT
ZEUS
vs.
EL GIGANTE

DOODOO IS GOOD FOR ME...

AND DOODOO IS GOOD FOR YOU!

NACHO BURRITO

KING KAHUA

The Indigestion Connection

FINISHING MOVE: the HEIMLICH MANEUVER

YOU MAY NOW TURN THE PAGE.

TORCH TALK

BY WADE KELLER

EDDIE GILBERT

"MY SIDE"

"Ric Flair had called in at 8:30 in the morning and left it on the machine in the office for someone to call me to tell me not to come in (for the booking meeting). Ric Flair, all the time he was the booker or whatever, never told me that I was off the committee. Nobody ever did... Every day that I got up, I had to think, now what's going to happen next? I went through pure hell for eight months, and a lot of people don't know that."

The last few years of Eddie Gilbert's career have included more politics than Washington D.C. After time in Jarrett's Memphis, Ron West's Continental, and the NWA, Eddie returned to Memphis in July of this year. In the following "Torch Talk" interview conducted by Wade Keller over the phone on June 25, 1990, Eddie Gilbert speaks openly, for the first time for print, his perspective on his last controversial stint with the National Wrestling Alliance...

WADE KELLER: WHEN YOU ENTERED THE NWA EARLY IN 1989, WERE YOU BROUGHT IN FOR OFFICE WORK IN ADDITION TO WRESTLING?

EDDIE GILBERT: When I came back to the NWA it was under strange circumstances because, as everyone knows, I had a good, successful run as a booker in the UWF and then when I went back to Memphis, Jerry Lawler was the booker. But for about the two months that I was there, they somewhat just kind of put it in my hands and let me do what I wanted to do with it. They jumped the houses with the Lawler-Eddie Marlin-Jeff Jarrett-Gilbert family angle or program which I was very happy about, especially getting to work with my idol, Jerry Lawler.

When Jack Curtis, who was in Alabama at the time, called, he was looking for someone to replace Robert Fuller who was the booker in Alabama at the time. None other than Cowboy Bill Watts suggested he get a hold of me. So I took the job there. And when I was there, houses that were doing $2000 every Saturday night went to an average of $10,000 or $8000.

Then about July of that year, 1988, I received a phone call from Jim Barnett in the NWA office and at the time Dusty Rhodes was still the booker. Rumors had gotten out at the time about a possibility of a sale by (Jim) Crockett (owner of the NWA, Jim Crockett Promotions) to Turner Broadcasting.

Believe it or not, Dusty Rhodes had called the Alabama office one time leaving a message for me to call him. I thought it was a rib and that somebody else had done it. So I never returned the call. So when Jim Barnett finally got a hold of me he says something like, "Well, what's your situation there and how much longer do you think you're going to be there. You've done very well for yourself. Did Dusty call you?"

I said, "Yes sir, but I thought that was a joke."

Barnett said, "He probably wants your help in some way, providing him with new ideas."

I said, "Well, I don't know. Do you think there would be a chance of me coming back there."

He said, "Eddie, when you get ready to leave there, I would hope that you would call us. I think things have changed. A few months back when you were actually pushed out, I think there was a lot going on then, but I think feelings have changed. Jimmy Crockett really feels bad for you and that Dusty pushed you out. So think about us when you get ready to leave."

When the explosion happened between myself and David Woods (of Alabama's CWF), the first person that called was Jim Barnett. I told him that I was no longer employed by David Woods. He said, let me talk to Dusty and I'm sure you'll be getting the call.

I got the call, this was October of 1988. When I got the call to come in all kinds of rumors began circulating that Dusty's on his way out and I was going to be the next booker. So at that point in time, there were rumors around, and I think that maybe half or the majority in the office at the time wanted me somewhat, maybe as an assistant or some of my ideas being used, but I don't think Dusty wanted that.

Dusty did have a change of attitude toward me. I always admired him, no matter what anyone said about Dusty, he had one of the longest runs as a successful booker in the NWA. One night in Pittsburgh about after my third week back he came into the dressing room where I was at, put his arm around me, and said, "Eddie, baby, I wants you to comes out with meez tonight and we get the limousine and you I will have a few dwinks and spend the night a talkin." So we let everything go under the bridge after that and next thing I knew Dusty was out, Jimmy Crockett was in, and the regime stayed the same as far as the office personnel went. Barry Windham kind of slipped in there as an assistant a little bit and then next thing I knew, of course, was George Scott.

KELLER: HOW DID THE ATTITUDE IN THE OFFICE CHANGE TOWARD YOU ONCE DUSTY WAS NO LONGER BOOKER?

GILBERT: Well, in the meantime, when Jimmy Crockett took over the booking job from Dusty, Jimmy was the man who started giving me the push. He's started using my talent. It was his idea for the Ricky Steamboat, Eddie Gilbert versus Barry Windham, Ric Flair thing. It was his idea for me to wrestle Barry Windham. It was his idea for me to wrestle Ric Flair. I think a lot of that had to do with me - I got hurt a couple of times, including where I got dropped through a rail in Greenwood, Mississippi about my third week back with the NWA. My elbow went through the railing, hit the floor, and I swear in a week's time my elbow was the size of a softball and from my elbow to my wrist it was black and blue, but I never missed a shot and I kept working. I showed up at one of the TBS tapings with my arm like that and Jimmy Crockett came over to me and asked what I was doing there. I said, "I want to keep my job." From that day forward Jimmy Crockett has been very fair to me.

So coming back, there were a lot of rumors that I was coming back as office personnel. But it didn't happen until after the George Scott thing and everybody pushed for me.

KELLER: SO AROUND THE TIME OF THE CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS VI, APRIL OF 1989, GEORGE SCOTT WAS FIRED AND THE COMMITTEE STARTED, RIGHT?

GILBERT: Jimmy Crockett, everybody knew that he was the interim booker and there were a lot of names up. Kevin Sullivan, who always rides a bandwagon, I will say this, he is a very smart person as far as wrestling goes. I don't consider Kevin Sullivan a leader; he's a follower. He had it in his head that it was going to be me and him together after Crockett as co-bookers. I was led to believe I was a candidate for it. Lots of other people were up for it, like Bill Watts, Ole Anderson's name came up, just the same people you always see up for it.

Right before that Clash (VI) my brother had called me on my answering machine and said, "I didn't know if you knew that George Scott had been fired. That was right before I went to bed, and thought that it had to be rumor. The next morning the secretary from the office had called. I just wanted you to know that Jim Herd's about to call you. I said, oh wow, I wonder what this could be about? I went downstairs, and the phone rang, it was Jim Herd, and he says, "I guess you know that George Scott's been let go. Eddie Gilbert, I would like you to come in and be part of a committee with Ric Flair, Jim Ross, Kevin Sullivan, Jim Barnett, and myself." I said, "Yes sir, I'll be there." That started it.

KELLER: WHEN THE COMMITTEE FORMED, DID YOU THINK THAT THE BOOKING COMMITTEE CONCEPT COULD WORK?

GILBERT: I tell ya', I really did. This is where another part, I learned, I thought we were all going in to the committee situation with one thing in mind, and that's with the organization in mind. I thought if Ric Flair and I disagreed on something, or if Ric Flair and Kevin Sullivan disagreed on something, or if myself and Jim Barnett, that's what we were in there for. I thought we were in there not to argue and fight, but if you didn't agree, state why you didn't agree and let's work it out and get what's the best for company, not what's the best of that person looking across from you. I had no idea that's what it was about.

I was sitting in there and many, many times told exactly how I felt. And when I say that, I don't mean I hit my hand on the table and say, "No that's wrong!" I really told them a lot of things I thought were bad ideas and it didn't set well with other people on the committee. The committee aspect, that's why it didn't work. We went in all different directions. A lot of them would sit in there and agree on a stupid idea and then leave that room. Then two or three people would get together and say, "That was the stupidest idea I ever heard."

KELLER: HOW DID YOU END UP NO LONGER BEING PART OF THE COMMITTEE?

GILBERT: Here you go. Here's the story on that. I had no idea that Ric Flair's ultimate goal was to be sole booker. Even though he did a decent job and he could someday probably be a sole booker without working. First I want to say I have utmost respect for him, one of the greatest pro wrestlers of all time. Anytime I worked against him, it was a privilege. But I had no idea how big of an ego he had. I didn't realize he wanted to be THE

booker. None of us, I thought, wanted that responsibility. The committee thing went on. I kept hearing in my ear, "We need one booker."

This is where Paul E. Dangerously came in losing his job. Paul E. started politicing for myself. There were a lot of others who did the same. I let it be known to Mr. Herd and Mr. Barnett, that yes, if given the chance, I would like to be the booker. Ric Flair and Kevin Sullivan and even Jim Ross knew - and all three of those people also wanted it.

It seemed to me that it was my age; I was the snot-nosed young punk in the room. But you look at it, I was the only one in the room - I've learned real quick, like Warren Beatty said for twelve of thirteen years, letting people talk about him and him not voice his opinion, I don't anyone else who's going to do it for me, even though you bulletins, Meltzer's bulletins, and Steve Beverly's bulletins, and people that write in, they've been very, very good to me, as far as saying the jobs that I've done were what they were. But I was the only person in the room that, where ever I went, the booking job that I had was successful.

Because what a lot of the fans and people don't know reading the bulletins, the Bashes that were booked last year were booked by me. The triple crown deal, those two ring battle royals, that was mine. Because they didn't have Ric Flair, they needed that. The Terry Funk-Sting thing was my idea. Me and Muta was my idea, to help Muta. And of course Lex and Ricky Steamboat, that was totally my stuff. And I'll tell you why. This is my evidence. All the committee had booked the Bashes, and they had booked the Bashes with Flair on them already. Also, I'll tell ya', that national angle with Flair and Funk, that was mine. That's where a lot of heat with Ric Flair started with me. He didn't like me coming up with an idea about him.

This is how it came about. I was sitting here one night at home. Jim Ross had gone on vacation. Ric Flair was off on his boat somewhere because of the two months that he was off, Kevin was in Florida doing something. Every one of the committee members was out of whack, except me. I was here in Atlanta. I was the only one going to the office on this one week. Everyone else was gone. Barnett and Herd were in the office, and it was just Eddie. I'm sitting here one night and Jim Barnett calls me and tells me, and both he and Herd have been very good to me, he says, "Petrick and the upper body of the company, they don't want Flair at these shows." Which I thought was great because you needed to save him for the pay-per-view. He continued, "We need a change of the card." Here I was, and what do I do?

KELLER: SO FLAIR IS ON VACATION AND DOES NOT KNOW THIS IS HAPPENING?

GILBERT: Yes. Kevin Sullivan had called in with his ideas and nobody liked them. Jim Barnett's idea was Terry Funk against me in the Bash tour.

They didn't want Sting and Muta meeting before the Bash and they didn't want Flair versus Funk. Kevin's thing had Sting and Muta and Kevin didn't think Lex ought to be switched then (as Luger was a face at that time); he thought he ought to be working with Michael Hayes. And it was me and Funk that Kevin had down.

Then Barnett came in with me and Funk, Lex and Steamboat, and Sting and Muta.

Then I came up with my list, and it had the triple crown. Nobody else had anything like that. Barnett said we needed an extra bonus match because we couldn't have Flair on the card, we had to have something extra. At that time that's when the horseraces ended, and I came up with "Triple Crown" reading USA Today and it just hit me one morning. So I had the double-ring battle royal, me and Muta, Funk and Sting, and Lex and Ricky Steamboat. That was my idea to switch, the way we switched Steamboat and Luger. I didn't know I was burying myself with the rest of the guys who thought, "Who is this young punk kid."

But you know what happened? The Bashes drew without Ric Flair. They sure did. I'm just telling the truth. A lot of people don't know this stuff and I'm doing this interview so they'll know.

Not long after that, the day after the Baltimore Bash, Ric Flair threatened to walk out. He walked out in the middle of meeting. Guess who walked out of the room with him. Me. To show my loyalty to a guy who was fixin' to cut my throat. So I walked out of the room saying, "Champ, whatever you think, I'm behind ya' all the way."

KELLER: WHY DID FLAIR WALK OUT OF THE MEETING?

GILBERT: He thought they didn't appreciate the show that he had done. He was tired. But Flair is very good at this. That was his fifth, sixth, seventh hundredth time of throwing a tantrum. But I was just trying to show him I thought the committee was supposed to stick together. That's where I was learning. I wound up going back in the room. Flair went ahead and left.

This is when Ric made his powerplay. He told them, either you give me the booking job or I'm leaving. That happened. He wouldn't take any calls or anything. In the mean time the committee was still together. I walk into Centre Stage for a taping one night and I see Ric. He's giving orders to everybody. I didn't even know he was back. He comes up, hugs my neck, says, "Eddie I couldn't believe it. I turned around, there you were walking out with me. I'll never forget that."

How soon we forgot.

Remember the couple of matches I had with Brian Pillman on TV? Well, that was my idea, because I liked Brian Pillman. I thought I was going to get to be heel. Flair told me I would. Since he was the chairman, (I believed him).

Then Flair started two arguments with me at Centre Stage (over his matches with Brian Pillman) and really quick during this time is when the thing happened with Paul E. (Dangerously). One of the nights I was working with Pillman, Ric was watching the monitor and Paul was doing that famous last interview (his last "Danger Zone"). When he got finished, Flair looked at me and says, "Fire him, Eddie."

I went, "What?"

He said, "Go fire him, now."

I turned out and went out the door, and I'm thinkin' to myself all the way up there, "Paul, get your rear back in there and you tell this man whatever you did wrong you will make right." At that point in time still I didn't know how bad Ric was out to get me. As I started up there to tell Paul E., Flair passed me on the way up there and says, "Eddie, I'm sorry, I forgot about the friendship (between Gilbert and Dangerously)." Well, the rest is history between Paul E. and Flair right there, as we all know (about the shouting argument between Paul and Flair, ending in Paul no longer being with the NWA.)

KELLER: HOW DID YOU END UP BEING REMOVED FROM THE COMMITTEE?

The next morning following this we were supposed to have a booking meeting. This is how I got let go. This is our World Champion. This is the man everybody out there looks up to and I look up to. This is how he let me go. I got up that morning. I had to get a physical for the New York State Athletic Commission. I had to get up early, say eight o'clock. We had a ten o'clock booking meeting, so I went to my doctor in my casual clothes first. I went back to the house where Missy yells down and said, "The secretary called from the office and said that Ric Flair called and said you don't have to make the meeting this morning." So I said, "Well, does she know I got the message?" Missy said, "Nope."

So I got my suit on and went on anyway. I walked in and that's when I saw Cornette. Flair brought Cornette on the committee. He was surrounding himself with people he wanted. But he was in a meeting with Jim Herd. I walked back to Jannie Engle, the secretary. I said, "Where is the message?" She showed me the message. Ric Flair had called in at 8:30 in the morning and left it on the machine in the office for someone to call me to tell me not to come in. Ric Flair, all the time he was the booker or whatever, never told me that I was off the committee. Nobody ever did. I went home that day, feeling like, wow. And then from that day on, he did everything, and not just him, the whole committee. I know everybody's a fan of Jim Cornette, just like Jim Ross, he's the best at what he does. Jim Cornette, I've known him since I was twelve years old. Kevin Sullivan, neither here nor there. They all, all of them, tried their best to break me. They did everything to get Eddie Gilbert to quit or to breach his contract.

It makes me feel good that I was that important to try to get rid of. It really does. The way they took Missy and yanked her off TV, that was to get at me. They thought that would blow me, but I kept my cool. Even though everybody has their opinion about Tommy Rich, I did bring Tommy Rich back, because I knew Tommy and I wanted him to prove something to everybody that he could lose his weight and he could get back in shape, not as a superstar, but to show that he could do it if he put his mind to it. They did stuff to him to try to get at me. And they did everything possible. Every day that I got up I had to think, now what's going to happen next? I went through pure hell for eight months, and a lot of people don't know that. I appreciate the letters that have felt sorry for the way Eddie Gilbert has been treated, but they don't even know the beginning. They know what they saw on TV, but they don't know how I had to get up everyday saying, "I wonder what they're going to do next?"

KELLER: WERE THERE OTHER SPECIFIC INCIDENTS?

GILBERT: One of the committee members said to me one time in town, he said, "I admire you. You've done everything they've asked. They haven't broke you. Are you unfuckable?" And I go, "Yeah. Throw it at me."

(continued on page 31)

Ray Whelbe's RING RUMBLINGS

BOOKERS ARE OPEN TARGETS FOR ALL

Bookers, be it Seiji Sakaguchi, Ric Flair, Pat Patterson, Ole Anderson, Eric Embry, Greg Gagne, Mike Graham, Len Denton, Eddie Gilbert, Jerry Lawler, or Boney Morony all can share a common denominator: fear of losing their jobs. Considering the past track records of employment for bookers one can see why they would have cause to be paranoid. Like a baseball manager being fired is inevitable.

Accepting the job of a booker in wrestling may be suicidal. Yet all of us have the "if I were boss" competitiveness drive. Some of us refuse to act on it while most in the public eye exploit that drive whenever possible.

Whether you book for the NWA, WWF, AWA, or an independent, you do it for two reasons: your pocketbook and your ego. Both reasons can intertwine. Others may take place. However, when all is said and done, money and mind is all that counts in most of our lives. Family, love, and community, are important; being happy is the bottom line.

If a booker concerns himself with money, he must realize it is only a short time before his work will provide him none. Or at least history dictates such. ,

Being a fan it is easy to gripe about booking decisions, but let us take a deeper look at it. Bookers are blamed for bringing in their pals, but would we do it differently? I am not sure.

When people get promotions, they tend to hire people they know they can trust. They also look for people they know can get the job done. Future favors, will the employee "stooge" or sellout the boss, dependability, and maybe even paying back of favors may be considered. As a supervisor of a homeless shelter, I hired Derrick Dukes because he was a friend who could handle the job, needed the job, and would support me wholeheartedly. Was I right in doing so? You bet. Therefore can we really expect a booker to do things differently? Think before you answer.

Being a booker puts one in a tremendously powerful position. You can get off on being a boss which often goes to the best of your heads. You can also help friends in need get some green. If you know your job is in danger anyway, are you wrong for trying to take care of your friends? I am not sure. The good ol' boy system is alive everywhere.

The PWA, for which I promote, has taken a novel look at booking. Eddie Sharkey is the boss, brains, and guts of the group. He reads newsletters and takes advice from fans, wrestlers, and promoters. He attacks a card like a chef may mold a stew. He throws a little of this and that into the kettle, listens to his cook aides, and blends the mix into a wonderful array. Rarely do fans argue with this recipe.

Like it or not, the WWF has taken some of the paranoia out of their employees. Yes, for the most part, they hire controllable good ol' boys, but they also do not operate out of fear. They run their show like a business. They storyboard, plan, do marketing goals, and stick to the big picture. For that reason, and that reason alone, they deserve booker of the year honors.

Len Denton has done an admirable job in Portland. Yet, he too, has suffered some from the good ol' boy system. He has put himself into the limelight a bit too often and does have some political cronyism as he must put over a tiny, alleged rapist. At least he keeps things exciting. Could he, though, be a believable NWA or WWF Champion? Hardly.

Booking for a wrestling group is the hardest job in the entire sport. If you do what you think is right for your company you may get the axe anyway. Especially if crowds are dismal. If you do right by your friends, too, you may lose your job. Not taking the job in the first place might be the best move of all.

TALENT MEANS VERY LITTLE WHEN GETTING BOOKED

How one gets "booked" or hired for matches in professional wrestling is an interesting topic. In entertainment, a casting couch was once quite popular. In vaudeville, talent shows were fun. In baseball, eventually the cream rises. In boxing, the best fighters have a chance. In wrestling, how you get booker depends on numerous factors other than talent. In fact, talent may have very little to do with it. Who you know and the timing of what you offer besides yourself can be big factors.

Nate the Rat is not a bad manager, but his cabbie skills are what secured him a job. Honkeytonk Man's ability to work on cars in Calgary helped. Jonnie Stewart was once booked over Matt Derringer because he had "the robe." Rick "Wild Alaskan" Renslow often gets work because he has a ring. Beef Burton got a lot of a work because he had a referee shirt, mask, and could set up the ring and was willing to play all three roles. Many get booked because they have good cars. Others provide food, liquor, or even drugs. Charlie Norris was once booked because he is an Indian medicine man. Cuban Assassin keeps a job as El Gigante's translator.

Timing also plays a big part. The Road Warriors received an open door from Ole Anderson in a time of need. Larry Cameron went to Calgary after Soldat Ustinov did not. Ed Leslie was a reliever for sickly Wayne Ferris and became Brutis Beefcake. Yes, timing plays an extra big part.

Another part of timing is, does a promotion need a body and what kind of body do they need. Tom Burton fits in nicely as Tony Anthony's partner as they are both ring fundamentalists and balding. Brian Adams became a Demolition member due to Bill Eadie's illness. Savannah Jack entered the UWF because Bill Watts wanted a black face to push.

Knowing somebody often helps, too. Brett Sawyer rode Buzz's fame into the NWA. Tom Zenk's WWF door was opened by Rick Martel with whom he toured Japan. Dave Shultz, Ed Leslie, and Wayne Ferris went to the WWF per Hogan. Thunderbolt Patterson works the big time by the grace of God and Ole Anderson.

Talent is a minor part unfortunately. If not a Dennis Stamp, Steve O, and Billy Anderson would have gotten bigger pushes. If talent had any justice in this sport, Chris Benoit, Bob Cook, Ricky Rice, Derrick Dukes, Velvet McIntire, Larry Cameron, Teijho Khan, Wellington Wilkens, Brady Boone, or The Great Wojo would have gotten major pushes years ago. Talent is generally secondary in this sport.

Does it need to be changed? Certainly. Will it be changed? Do not hold your breath.

ONE LAWSUIT, A THOUSAND HEADACHES

This past year for me in pro wrestling has been one of numerous challenges. I fought with radio general managers; I fought with kayfabe sheet editors, writers, and readers; I was sued by the AWA. The fight with general managers was expected and the battles with the sheets was healthy, but the lawsuit was no fun at all.

The suit came as retaliation to Dale Gagner for starting his own promotion. It was alleged that he used the AWA"s name unfairly and unauthorized to gain shows. Stealing their wrestlers was alleged as well. Al Eppenstein, late of Windy City Wrestling, and yours truly, were named as codefendants. It was believed that we were leaders in Gagner's firm.

As the suit unfolded, I became scared as hell. First, a long haired dirtball knocked on my door with a one-hundred plus page of proposed suit. From that time on it seemed more paperwork came daily.

Securing a lawyer was no treat. Being unemployed for a spell I could not afford a big time attorney. Legal aid took the case, but backed away from fearing Vytas Rimas and his firm Kinney and Lange may drag things out forever. Three others felt the same. A friend of the family told me it would cost no less than $5000 to fight.

This did not seem fair. I was not a corporate member of Gagner's firm. Nor did I sell shows, misrepresent myself as an AWA staffer, have any special contracts with Gagner, or steal wrestlers. I was a ring announcer and road agent for five shows strictly as an independent. Had Verne Gagne or anyone else offered the same work, I would have taken it.

As the suit progressed, more fear set in. Lawyers who read it estimated the AWA spent between $10,000 and $20,000 to pull this thing together. For less, they could have me killed.

Before heading into court, I tried to make a deal with this Vytas character. He wanted me to pay between $1000 and $5000 and not promote for a year. I told him I preferred to explain my innocence to a judge and would file bankruptcy if I lost. At that point he asked if I would settle for the $100 if would cost to file bankruptcy. Unfortunately, when the fax for settlement came, he upped the ante to $1000.

When I appeared in court, I was totally confused. My faith in the system waned as I learned that if you have the cash, you can sue anyone anytime.

The judge, thank God, was as confused as I was as to why I was being dragged into all of this. He slapped the AWA's hands a bit for not settling this issue out of court and told me to be a good boy and go home. Vytas Rimas still did not want to talk. He wanted my skin.

This case is a sad statement on how the world and wrestling has turned. Deals are no longer made on handshakes but by approval of insurance agents and lawyers.

As for the AWA, they continue to sink to new lows. Granted, they have a right to be mad at what I write, say on radio or TV, or promote in their fine state. However, to attack me in court is ridiculous. Had they wanted info, a call would have worked. Had they wanted me to run and hide, death threats would work. Lawyers scare me, but not enough to lay down and die.

The funniest part of it all is that I never did anything illegal or that the AWA did not do. The AWA felt it was okay to bill Tully Blanchard as former WWF and NWA tag champions or Shane Douglas as being from the NWA after he quit. Yet, when I tried to get Baron Von Raschke an extra $150 a day for some independent shows because the AWA was booking him only about twice a month, they sued me.

Am I crying? I guess. Do I have reason? Probably.

The AWA is supposed to be the major league of professional wrestling. I guess by suing me they are living up to their claim. After all, major leagues these days cannot exist without lawyers. **

LATE NIGHT UNOFFICIAL TOP TEN LISTS

For the second year in a row, the readers of **Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly** have compiled an impressive list of top ten lists that you will not see in **The National**. Sit back, imagine David Letterman reading them, and enjoy the second annual Torch readers "Unofficial Late Night Top Ten Lists"...

RICH MOHRLAND'S TOP TEN POOR EXCUSES FOR NOT ATTENDING LIVE CARDS:
10)All the Ringsiders Look Like Losers and Degenerates
9) Will Not Drink 3.2 Beer
8) Death of a Spouse or Loved One
7) Everyone Knows the Future of Wrestling Is Pay-Per-View
6) Holding Out For The NWA To Come To Town
5) I'm Afraid Norman Might Go Nuts With An AK-47 Assault Rifle
4) Outstanding Warrants in Rochester.
3) All The Wrestlers Look Like Losers and Degenerates.
2) Verne Gagne Still Owes Me Money
1) I Don't Wanna Miss It On TV

PETER SCHRODER'S TOP TEN WRESTLERS I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE WITH ME AS I WALK INTO A ROUGH BAR:
10)Lex Luger
9) Butch Reed
8) Akira Maeda
7) Steve DiSalvo
6) Road Warrior Hawk
5) Kazuo Yamazaki
4) Scott Steiner
3) Dan Spivey
2) Steve Williams
1) Sid Vicious

RICH MOHRLAND'S TOP TEN WRESTLERS WHO SHOULD BE CRYOGENICALLY FROZEN UNTIL A CURE CAN BE FOUND FOR POOR WORKRATE:
10)Hulk Hogan
9) Junkyard Dog
8) Brutis Beefcake
7) Ole Anderson
6) Sgt. Slaughter
5) Norman
4) Nikolai Volkoff
3) Hacksaw Duggan
2) Iron Sheik
1) The Ultimate Warrior

JOHN RIORDANS TOP TEN "I TAKE MY SHOTS SO ONE DAY I CAN BE A PRO WRESTLER":
10)Warlord
9) Dino Bravo
8) Sid Vicious
7) Lex Luger
6) Smash
5) Axe
4) Animal
3) Hawk
2) Hulk Hogan
1) Anabolic Idiot

RICH MOHRLAND'S TOP TWELVE GREAT TUNES FOR WRESTLER'S ENTRANCE MUSIC:
12) What's So Funny About Peace, Love, and Understanding (Elvis Costello) - For Ricky "The Prophet" Rice
11) Sunday Bloody Sunday (U2) - For NWA Main Event Intro
10) I Wanna Be Sedated (Ramones) - For Norman the Lunatic
9) Rock the Casbah (The Clash) - For Sheik Adnan El Kaissey
8) Psycho Killer (Talking Heads) - Cactus Jack Manson
7) King of Pain (The Police) - For Randy Savage
6) Pump It Up (Elvis Costello) - For Lex Luger
5) Dirty Mind (Prince) - For Missy Hyatt
4) Eat To The Beat (Blondie) - For Kamala
3) London Calling (The Clash) - For Lord Littlebrook and The Royal Family
2) Frankenstein (Edgar Weaver) - For Scott Steiner
1) God Save the Queen (Sex Pistols) - For Sherri Martel

RICH MOHRLAND'S TOP TEN REASONS I STILL WATCH THE AWA:
10)Destruction Crew
9) Larry Zbyszko's Interviews
8) Convenient Local Time Slot
7) Keep Expecting A Hulk Hogan/Road Warrior Surprise Run-In During Tommy Jammer Match
6) Jake "The Milkman" Milliman
5) Anxiously Awaiting the Return of Marty O'Neil
4) Great Schmidt Beer Commercials
3) Seen All the "Munsters Today" Episodes on Channel 29
2) That Razor's Edge Suspense Over "The Team Challenge Series" Outcome
1) Keeps Me Abreast of all the Local Celebrity Golf Tournaments

PETER SCHRODER'S TOP TEN WOMEN OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN IN A PLAYBOY SPREAD:
10)Madusa Micelli
9) Bull Nakano
8) Chigusa Nagayo
7) Misty Blue
6) Sherri Martel
5) Honey (Calgary)
4) Precious
3) Dark Journey
2) Missy Hyatt
1) Elizabeth

TOP TEN FICTIONAL CHARACTERS WHO DO NOT BELONG IN WRESTLING BUT WILL PROBABLY TURN UP ON FUTURE NWA PAY-PER-VIEWS LIKE ROBOCOP:
10)Conan the Barbarian
9) Bart Simpson
8) Dracula
7) Captain America
6) Sinbad the Sailor
5) Joe Isuzu
4) Beowulf
3) Perry Mason
2) Randall Patrick MacMurphy
1) Zorro

JOHN RIORDAN'S TOP TEN "ALL JOBBER POSITIONS WERE FILLED SO THEY GAVE ME A PUSH":
10)Dusty "The American Disgrace" Rhodes
9) Akeem
8) Sheepwackers
7) Honkeytonk Man and Greg Valentine "Rhythm & Snooze"
6) Jimmy "Stupidfly" Snuka
5) Dino "The Dinosaur" Bravo
4) Ronnie "Head of Stone" Garvin
3) Brutis Fruitcake
2) Ock & Oil Distress
1) Tommy Rich

RICK MOHRLAND'S TOP TEN BEST RAVING PSYCHOPATHS:
10)Mad Dog Vachon
9) George the Animal Steele
8) Buzz Sawyer
7) The Missing Link
6) Nord the Barbarian
5) Abdullah
4) Moondog Spot
3) Kevin Sullivan
2) Cactus Jack
1) Bruiser Brody

TIM COUSAR'S TOP TEN WRESTLERS WHO DID NOT QUITE MAKE IT:
10)Masked Maskman
9) El Marko
8) Pansy Pink
7) Invisible Joe
6) Blazing Skull
5) The Amazing Wazoo
4) Blade Master
3) Post-Office Pete
2) Binky the Clown
1) Little Elvis

PETER SCHRODER'S TOP TEN WRESTLING PERSONALITIES I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A SERIOUS DRINKING SESSION WITH:
10)Jerry Lawler
9) Road Warrior Hawk
8) Jim Ross
7) Vince McMahon
6) Terry Funk
5) Jim Cornette
4) Jesse Ventura
3) Roddy Piper
2) Paul E. Dangerously
1) Ric Flair

JOHN RIORDAN'S TOP TEN "WHY HAVEN'T THEY ASKED ME TO A NURTI/SLIM COMMERCIAL?":
10)Junkfood Dog
9) Andre the Giant
8) Hillbilly Jim
7) Landfill Duggan
6) Norman
5) King Kong Bundy
4) Dusty "The American Disgrace" Rhodes
3) Akeem
2) The Canadian Milkshake
1) "Flabdullah" The Low Life

PETER SCHRODER'S TOP TEN INTERVIEWS:
10)Ole Anderson
9) Larry Zbyszko
8) Michael Hayes
7) Austin Idol
6) "Zodiac" Barry Orton
5) Jim Cornette
4) Ric Flair
3) Terry Funk
2) Jerry Lawler
1) Roddy Piper

TIM NOEL'S TOP TEN NO-TALENT-BUMS WHO SHOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR THEIR CURRENT JOBS:
10)Earthquake
9) Sheepherders
8) Steve Lombardi
7) Honkeytonk Man
6) Hillbilly Jim
5) Hercules
4) Jim Duggan
3) Akeem
2) Virgil
1) Junkyard Dog

JEFF COHEN'S TOP TEN REJECTED GIMMICKS:
10)When will Dusty explode?
9) Andre the Tap Dancing Giant
8) Brutis "The Proctologist" Beefcake
7) Ultimate Warrior-Sapphire Ring Wedding
6) "Texas Chainsaw" Tag Team
5) Abdullah Von Erich
4) The Haiti Kid's AIDS Test
3) Hot Coals Battle Royal
2) Manager Dan "The Brian" Quayle
1) Adorable Mike Tyson

MIKE LANO'S TOP TEN DUMB THINGS DONE BY JIM HERD:
10)His mismanagement of Flair and the loss of The Road Warriors
9) Not Listening 100% of the Time To Eddie Gilbert

8) Not giving Watts a Chance at Booker
7) Almost Losing Cornette and The Midnight Express and Dangerously
6) Letting Steamboat Go At Any Price
5) Pushing The Ding Dongs
4) Spending $35,000 on El Gigante's Costume
3) Booking Committee and Being On It
2) Ding Dongs
1) Leaving Pizza Hutt

STEVE GENNARELLI'S TOP TEN ROOMS IN THE FORTHCOMING PRO WRESTLING HALL OF FAME
10)Tights & Boots Room - Yes, it is Odor Free
9) Room of Stipulations - See the famous cages, see how they are made, the shaver that shaved Jerry Lawler, stretchers, straps, chains, it is all here.
8) Artifacts Room - Baseball's from no-hit games? None of that here. Examine Abdullah's twisted fork. The Sheik's nefarious pencil and unused magic paper for flames. Ticket stubs from MSG and The Olympic. Syringes from some of today's stars. Are you in Heaven? No, you are in the Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame.
7) International Room - Lucha Libre artifacts, a statue of Rikidozan and a ring from India are among the many International Objects.
6) The AV (Audio Visual) Room - Has a replica of Titan's three person announcing platform. You and two friends can try to recapture the magic of Bruce Pritchard, Mike McGuirk, and The Bock. Watch as computer simulation pits stars of yesterday versus those of today. Listen as Roddy Piper insults callers on a 1986 Boston radio show, and much, much more.
5) Belt & Trophy Room - See the NWA Western States Heritage belt.
4) Hall Library - Comprehensive holdings include newspaper clippings, magazines, books, kayfabe sheets, and least we forget State Athletic Commission Guidelines.
3) Auditorium - Each day there will be a presentation by the resident historian and perhaps a match.
2) Present day Stars Room - Pictures and memorabilia of active performers.
1) The Inductees Wing - Like Cooperstown, plaques of those who made a difference are this Hall's centerpeice.

JOHN RIORDAN'S TOP TEN WORST ANNOUNCERS OF ALL TIME:
10)Hillbilly Jim
9) Marc Lowrance
8) Bow Dow
7) Greg Gagne
6) Verne Gagne
5) Vince McMahon
4) Davey Crockett
3) "Olde" Anderson
2) Lord Alfred Hayes
1) Gorilla Monsoon

JOHN RIORDAN'S TOP TEN WORST BOOKERS OF ALL TIME:
10)NWA Booking Committee
9) Ric Flair
8) Mario Savoldi
7) Jerry Jarrett
6) Verne Gagne
5) "Olde" Anderson
4) George Scott
3) Vince McMahon
2) Dusty Rhodes
1) Fritz Von Erich

STEVE GENNARELLI'S TOP TEN REASONS FOR WATCHING 1990 MSG HOUSE SHOWS:
10)Like it when they occasionally pan up to see Garden ceiling, what a sight!
9) That moment in the second or third match where Lord Alfred Hayes displays some heel tendencies but quickly reverts to nice.
8) Like to see if the same people get comps (complimentary tickets) each month.
7) Fred Blassie shows up once every fifteen months, don't want to miss him.
6) Sometimes when the show ends you see the ring being taken apart.
5) Fun counting how many of their Road Agents show up.
4) Nifty music MSG Network uses to segway to Ads.
3) Like it when Monsoon wanes nostalgic about working here twenty-five years ago, then realize he is not allowed to say his rival's name.
2) MSG Cable does nice sports updates during intermission.
1) Like it when Finkel announces next month's card... it is the only suspense of the night.

ELYSE ZOIS'S TOP TEN WORST DRESSED LIST:
10)Mark Young - He looks like he got caught in a flag factory.
9) The Barbarian - Is it Halloween?
8) Queen Sherri - Elvira would love her.
7) Gorilla Monsoon - Puleez!
6) Jim Cornette - Is he color blind?
5&4) The Bushwackers - The less said, the better.
3&2) Dusty Rhodes and Sapphire - Polka dots make you look fat.
1) Norman - Pajama's have not been in for years.

ELYSE ZOIS' TOP TEN HAIR DON'TS:
10)Greg Valentine
9) Samoan Savage
8) Barry Windham
7) Queen Sherri
6) Jimmy Garvin
5) Cactus Jack
4) Warlord (pre-Slick)
3) The Genius
2) Red Rooster
1) Zeus (remember him?)

ELYSE ZOIS' TOP TEN REASONS FOR WATCHING WRESTLING:
10)It is never out of season. When the baseball, football, hockey, etc. season ends, you can still watch wrestling.
9) It promotes understanding of current events. Would you rather hear about Lithuania and the USSR on the evening news, or watch Nikolai Volkoff vs. Boris Zhukov. (Don't answer).
8) It gets rid of household pests. A lot of my visitors leave when I turn it on.
7) It does not promote tooth decay. In fact, watching some of the wrestlers reminds me to brush and floss.
6) You can take the kids. The wrestlers probably will not be offended by their clothes or language.
5) It is patriotic. President Bush watches wrestling. That is good enough for me.
4) You can drive after watching. Probably to a bar.
3) It is non-fattening. If you are juggling a camera, stop watch, and pencil, how can you eat a hot dog? If you are watching The Earthquake or Norman, why would you want to?
2) It is educational. How else would you know where to find your patella tendon, external occipital protuberance, or deepest darkest Africa?
1) It is entertaining. Who needs the Three Stooges when you can have the Bushwackers? Who needs Don Rickels when you have Jim Cornette? Who needs soap operas when you have Wrestling Challenge?

BRIAN LAUGHLIN'S TOP TEN ALLEGED STEROID SPECIMENS:
1) Anabolic Warrior
2) Sid Vicious
3) The Barbarian
4) Warlord
5) Jimmy Snuka
6) Hulk Hogan
7) Lex Luger
8) Animal
9) Hawk
10)Dino Bravo

BRIAN LAUGHLIN'S TOP TEN WORST INTERVIEWS:
1) Kerry Von Erich
2) Ultimate Warrior
3) Rick Steiner
4) Andre the Giant
5) Scott Steiner
6) Robert Gibson
7) Mr. Fuji
8) Norman
9) Steve Williams
10)Dino Bravo

RYAN JONES' BOTTOM TEN STOMACHS:
1) Buddy Rose
2) Norman
3) Dusty Rhodes
4) Abdullah the Butcher
5) Andre the Giant
6) Akeem
7) The Earthquake
8) Sapphire
9) Tugboat
10)Bam Bam Bigelow

RYAN JONES' TOP TEN WORST PERSONALITIES:
1) Dusty Rhodes
2) Tommy Rich
3) Robert Gibson
4) Ricky Morton
5) Dino Bravo
6) Mr. Fuji
7) Verne Gagne
8) Bad News Brown
9) Akeem
10)The Warlord

DAVID SKOLNICK'S TOP TEN RIC FLAIR CLICHES:
10)I'm a 60 minute man
9) Diamonds are for4ever and so are the Horsemen
8) Put it into proper perspective Double A
7) Whether you like it or don't like it, learn to love it...
5) I'm a jet flying, limousine riding, kiss stealing, wheeling dealing, son of a gun
4) To be the man, you've got to beat the man
3) Now we go to school!
2) The bottom line is...
1) Whoo!

BILL KUNKEL'S TOP TEN TOUGHEST THINGS TO DO WHILE WEARING A MASK:
10)Dunking for apples
9) Making out
8) Crossing international border
7) Shaving
6) Boarding an airplane
5) Become a rock star
4) Get a passport
3) Become a Priest
2) Getting a haircut
1) Attend a family reunion (unless you come from Parts Unknown, of course)

BILL KUNKEL'S TOUGHEST ONE THING TO DO WHILE NOT WEARING A MASK:
1) Work in Mexico

JOHN RIORDAN'S TOP TEN MATCHES I WOULD PAY TO SEE:
10)Randy Savage vs. Lex Luger
9) Big Van Vader vs. Sid Vicious
8) Owen Hart vs Great Muta
7) Bam Bam Bigelow vs. King King Bundy
6) Midnight Express vs. Hart Foundation
5) Mr. Perfect vs. Brian Pillman
4) Big Bossman vs. Barry Windham
3) The Rockers vs. Doom
2) Furnas & Kroffat vs. The Steiners
1) Hulk Hogan vs. Ric Flair

***

READER

MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHAT A KNOCKOUT

BOYCE JOHANSON (Arvada, CO): My most memory making moments in wrestling all happened in 1989. Such as last year at the NWA's card May 30th. The match was The Road Warriors versus The Samoan Swat Team. During an aisle brawl, my hero, the Hawkster, was flung into the first two seats of the front row. The same two seats, in fact, that my brother-in-law and I were in just mere seconds before the brawl. With my idol just a few feet from me and a blood thirsty Samu creeping closer, I nudged my seat near Hawk so he could fend off the enemy. Sure enough, Hawk grabbed the chair and slammed it into Samu's gut. Then, with tongue out and fists clenched, he let out a battle cry that only The Warrior's could do. As the fans, led by myself, The Warrior's biggest fan, went wild, The Warriors chased the dreaded Samoans back to the locker room.

Another moment I will never forget includes a March 89 independent card where a match between "Playboy" Buddy Rose and "Too Cold" Scorpio took place. I along with friends Randy and Rodney Calkins were booing the "Doughboy" like crazy when we stopped booing and were busy trying to put our tongues back in our mouths and our eyes back in our heads over the sight of Rose's blonde valet. I was feeling good and cool, so I decided to go over to her and get her autograph and with any luck, maybe more. Anyway, she agreed to the autograph and said she was flattered by the gesture. Not paying any attention to the action in the ring, which I should have been doing, I did not notice Rose bound off the loose ropes. The weight of the impact broke the wooden ringpost in half which fell and bounced off my skull. I collapsed, but soon awoke at the sight of the beautiful valet.

A KIND KILLER

THE RANDOM MARC: In the early 1960's a few of my high school buddies and I were standing outside the WBBM TV studios in Chicago, the place where Brent Musberger started, after a live Saturday afternoon TV wrestling show. The real wrestling promotion at this time belonged to the late, great Fred Kohler, but WBBM was working with a group featuring former football star Gene "Big Daddy" Lipscomb and a number of others, like "The Bat," destined to go no where, with an occasional real star.

Out of the front door, on to McClurg Ct. came that day's lead face. I don't remember who it was. He was mobbed by a bunch of young kids seeking autographs. He ignored them all and strutted to a waiting car, entered the car, and was whisked away. The kids were hurt and disappointed.

A few minutes later, out comes the lead heel. The baddest of the bad. The kids recognize him and a few tentatively approach him. He hunches down so he is eye level with the kids and begins signing autographs and exchanging talk with all these kids. The kids are hypnotized. There is magic in the air. I am watching this from twenty feet away; I am also hypnotized. He stays hunched down with his new friends until everyone who wants an autograph or a word with him has gotten it. The parents, off to the side, begin dragging the kids away to go home. He is still there, chatting amiably with the few kids remaining, until they too are dragged away by parents and older siblings. All of the kids waved goodbye to him as they are being dragged away. Now he is alone. He rises to his feet and walks down the street. Alone.

To me he looked like the White Knight riding into the sunset. I had been booing him and cheering an arrogant face. Never again! For the last twenty-eight years my heart has been with the bad guys. Because on this day I discovered that good guys are often really bad guys and vice versa. I was privileged to witness a glimpse of another side of the "despicable, mean, and dirty" Killer Kowalski.

A SIMPLE HANDSHAKE

STEVEN SEILER: My most memorable moment as a pro wrestling fan was when I was watching wrestling at Muzzy Field in Bristol, Connecticut. Don Muraco was nonchalantly walking around enjoying the evening. I caught up to him and told him he was one of the best. He shook my hand. He was a villain at that time teaming with Bob Orton.

NEW KIND OF TRAFFIC JAM

PETER SCHRODER (Melbourne, Australia): One of the most memorable moments I have had as a fan of pro wrestling occurred way back in 1970 at Festival Hall, the arena here in Melbourne. I was about twelve years old and by saving my lunch money during the week I would sneak off to the arena for each Saturday night's mayhem. There were many wild and bizarre incidents that, seen through the wide eyes of youth, were extremely potent in the impression they left on me, but one extraordinary occurrence stands out from that surreal period of time.

It was a match between the evil King Curtis and the beloved Mark Lewin, who was a god in Australia. These guys had been in a heated and bloody feud for quite some time but this night was the one when things got out of hand. As the action spilled out of the ring and up the aisle towards the exit, I figured they would just brawl to the dressing room and that would be the end of the shenanigans for the evening. Boy was I wrong.

Instead, Curtis dragged Lewin, or vice-versa, out of the main exit which lead on to the pavement out front of the arena. The crowd poured out after them and I jostled for a reasonable position in order to catch this strange extension of seemingly typical Lewin vs. Curtis bloodbath. It was pretty hectic out there and hard to see exactly what was going on, but the upshot of it all was that King Curtis tried to throw Mark Lewin into a bus that was trying to pass through all this commotion.

This incident made third page of the daily newspaper here in Melbourne as "Wrestling Gets Out of Hand." I don't know if it was an angle portrayed with overexhuberance or whether they genuinely lost control, but the one thing I always found most memorable about all for this was the expression on the faces of the people on the bus. What must they have thought as these two blood-soaked madmen tried to throw each other into their transport home?

FOUND PIPER'S RENT-A-CAR

BRIAN LAUGHLIN & RYAN JONES (Minneapolis, MN): It was September 9, 1989 before a WWF card at the Met Center in Bloomington. We were in the Mariott Hotel across the street from the Met looking to see wrestlers on their way to the arena. We saw Dusty Rhodes in the lobby waiting for someone. Out of the gift shop came Roddy Piper and they proceeded out to the parking lot and we followed them. We met up with them and started talking to them. Piper paid one of us five dollars for finding his rental car. The conversation was cut short when Piper said they would get fined if they did not get to the arena soon. After the card, which was better than average for a WWF card, we returned to the hotel to see more wrestlers.

That is when we met The Torch's own Wade Keller and talked to him for a while. Then we went up to the fourth floor of the hotel looking to see more wrestlers. We saw Jim Duggan, Tito Santana, Bret Hart, Ted DiBiase, Arn Anderson, Tully Blanchard, "Brother Love" Bruce Pritchard, Big Bossman, and The Honkeytonk Man. We ran around the hotel until about 12:30 AM ditching security. It was one of those eventful nights that any young, die-hard wrestling fan would remember for a long time.

GRADUATION PREEMPTS WRESTLING

ROBERT GARRISON (Raytown, MO): The night of May 24, 1973 in Memorial Hall in Kansas City, KS, Harley Race defeated Dory Funk Jr. to win the NWA Heavyweight Title for the first time. The reason that night is so memorable to me personally is that I was not present for the match, instead, I was across town in the RLDS Auditorium in Independence, MO graduating from high school. Now, you have to understand that, while I would watch wrestling on my TV pretty regularly ever since I was a small boy, I did not attend my first live show until about eight months previous to this night - at which point I went head-over-heels for the sport, attending live matches semi-regularly, buying magazines, etc. And while, in those days, I could simply not afford to go to every weekly show at Memorial Hall, I did develop the early goal of wanting

to see the very best in action over there - I wanted to see the world's champ in action.

Well, as I recall, around this period of time Funk had suffered a serious shoulder injury of some sort, an accident on the ranch down in Texas or some such story, and had to lay off wrestling for a number of months. And when his shoulder finally healed, and he got back to defending his belt again, I was absolutely crushed when I found out his first scheduled appearance in Memorial Hall since the accident was to be the same night I had to graduate from high school. No normal parents, of course, would allow their child to miss graduation ceremonies just for the sake of a wrestling match.... but, I had some fun with the whole situation that evening.

To a couple of wrestling buddies who were graduating with me, I predicted that Race would indeed take the belt from Funk that night and we were going to miss it all just for the sake of walking down that aisle with a weird piece of cardboard on our heads. Of course, they did not believe me. Hey, I did not even believe me, as I said, I was just having some fun with the fact that we could not go to the matches. What a shock it was to read in the paper the next day that Race had indeed captured the title the night before.

The second one is of a little more recent vintage, and deals with the late Rick Stewart. As you may be aware, a few years ago Stewart was the chief wrestling announcer for Bob Geigel's Central States Wrestling promotion. In fact, during the period of time in 1986-87, when Jim Crockett's promotion was working together with Geigel's promotion, Stewart gained some national prominence, particularly as one of the announcers for the closed-circuit broadcast of Starrcade '86. That was the first year that the Starrcade show was brought as far north as Kansas City. I watched it at Memorial Hall in KC, KS and enjoyed it tremendously.

Cut to Thanksgiving night, 1987... Area wrestling fans had three choices that night. Well, at least they had three choices if they lived in Johnson County, KS, as that was and still is the only arena in town where PPV was available, and therefore, the choice of the WWF's inaugural Survivor Series. There was also a closed-circuit showing of Starrcade '87 scheduled for Municipal Auditorium in downtown KC, MO. Besides that, Bob Geigel's promotion, which at this point was beginning its slow death after the relationship with The Crocketts had ended, was also holding their annual Thanksgiving card at Memorial Hall. I had a friend who was heavily into the WWF, but nothing else, but since neither one of us knew anyone who lived in the Johnson County area, the Survivor Series was not really an option for us. But, remembering how much I had enjoyed the previous year's Starrcade show, and wanting to turn my friend on to something besides Hulk Hogan, anyway, I talked him into going to the Starrcade show with me.

So, on a drizzly Thanksgiving night, off we went. When we got to the auditorium, I noticed that there did not seem to be too many people around, and of the people I did see, more were walking away from the auditorium than were walking towards it. As we walked towards the building, I heard one woman speak to her child as they were walking away. "Maybe we can see some wrestling some other time, honey." And then I began to realize what was wrong, but I guess I did not want to believe it, because my friend and I kept heading towards the door of the building.

Then I saw a familiar figure on the street curb, leaning his head into a car that had pulled up to the front of the arena. He stepped away from the car, trotted up the steps to the door of the building, glanced inside, and trotted back down the stops, yelling, "Looks like it's been cancelled!!!" As he did so to whoever was in the car, the car pulled away and the familiar figure stood there at the curb, and started passing out white slips of paper to disappointed fans. I said to my friend, "Hey, that's Rick Stewart!" Then everything came to me in a rush. The Starrcade broadcast had been cancelled. But what was Rick Stewart doing there? One of the disgruntled fans passed by me, saying something to me about the show being off, and for no particular reason, I blurted out, "What? No refunds?" At this point, I was practically face-to-face with Stewart, and he promptly turned to me and said, "You can take your tickets back to where you purchased them, or you can take them over to Memorial Hall," handed me one of those white skips of paper, and then turned away to hustle some other disgruntled fans. I turned away in a bit of a daze at this point, and glanced over the paper I had been handed as my friend and I went back to the car. On one side was a brief description of that night's wrestling card at Memorial Hall, along with a mentioning of the fact that you could trade in your cancelled Starrcade tickets at the show and get two bucks back per ticket, to boot, because Starrcade tix were ten dollars, while tix to Geigel's show were only eight dollars. And, on the other side of the paper were printed directions on how to get to Memorial Hall.

Well, my friend and I continued our walk back to the car, and then, suddenly, the absurdity of the whole situation hit me. One year ago on this night, Rick Stewart was part of the broadcast team at Starrcade, and, I'm sure loving, every minute of it. And a year later, he is standing on a street curb in the rain, in front of a cancelled broadcast of Starrcade, trying desperately to get bodies into Memorial Hall, and I'm sure not loving every minute of it. It was actually quite sad, and yet, at the same time, pretty funny. So funny, in fact, that I started laughing. I laughed all the way back to the car and for several minutes after entering the car, too. I don't know if Stewart heard me. I certainly meant no disrespect. But it was the best laugh I had in several years and I am certain I have not laughed that hard since.

By the way, my friend and I went to Memorial Hall that night. We did not have anything better to do.

"WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE BEER?"

TONY JOHNSON (Chesnee, SC): My most memorable moment does not involve anything that happened in a wrestling match, in fact it did not even take place at an arena. My most memorable moment happened at a Speedy-Mart in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Sixteen miles from Spartanburg and every Saturday night we would go to wrestling at the Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium. This particular incident happened in 1977 or 1978 when I was 15 or 16 years old. The main event on the card that night was a US Heavyweight Title match between the champion, Blackjack Mulligan and Dino Bravo. After the matches were over we stopped at the local Speedy-Mart store. We did this about every week as usually one or two wrestlers would stop here on their way back to Charlotte, NC. After being there about thirty minutes this black Mercedes pulled up. A very attractive blond was driving and out of the passenger side popped Blackjack Mulligan. When he came back out of the store he had a case of Budweiser beer under one arm. As he walked by our car my cousin asked, "Hey, Blackjack, what's you favorite beer?"

Blackjack stopped and walked right toward us. My uncle and I backed up as Blackjack leaned down and asked my cousin, "What did you say, boy?"

My cousin bravely replied, "What's your favorite beer?"

Blackjack just turned around and got back in Mercedes with the blond and drove off.

Evidently he thought my cousin said he was his favorite queer.

BULLDOG RUINS NEW SUIT

BRUCE GRUMMERT (Omaha, NE): The main event here in St. Joe, MO on December 25, 1987 was for the Central States belt before a crowd of more than 800. Champion was "Bulldog" Bob Brown versus Dave Peterson.

It all started in Kansas City, August of 1985 when Brown and I really had a hatred for each other. I never did like the man, even when he wrestled in Lincoln or small towns here in Nebraska. You would always sense trouble between he and I. He would always walk to the ring in a fast movement, looking for me. He would come up to me, spit, shove, and deliberately try to hit me. This always made me angry. Of course, Geigel never did a thing until the incident in St. Joe.

This night, when Brown entered, he stopped and said to me he had a surprise for me. I got so uptight at times with Brown that I would shake, my blood pressure would rise, and I would see double. After the bell rang, I started a "Brown Sucks" chant. This always made him angry. He would start to yell profanity. Then Dave attacked Brown from behind and began to beat the hell out of him.

Finally, the sneak gouged Peterson's eyes, kicked, bit, clawed, and glared at me. He hit Dave with a chair covering Dave with blood. Brown then threw Dave to the floor. I saw it coming. I had a new winter coat and new pants on. Brown threw Dave into me face-first getting blood everywhere. Then he grabbed my coat and wiped Dave's face in it, threw it to the floor, and poured beer on it.

I was a bit happier as Brown was pinned by Peterson and lost his title. Brown then got out of the ring and shoved me. I was very mad about my clothes. Bob Geigel told me to send him the bill and he would take care of it. I said, "Hell no, I'll take care of it my way."

I called the Athletic Commission and told them what happened. Brown stayed until February and left for Canada. I was told if such an incident ever took place again he would get his licence stripped.

ALL IN ONE SENTENCE

CARL D. COOK (Cheneyville, LA): My most memorable moment was when pro wrestling was just that, pro wrestling, and I could not wait to get to the old Mid-South Wrestling house

shows or to see the Mid-South TV shows, because every week something was going down and bad wrestlers could just run over the good guys for just so long and the good wrestlers would come up with some way to run the bad guys out of Mid-South, and the bad wrestlers did something wrong like when a match went the wrong way or hurt somebody Mid-South would see that the two wrestlers were put back in the ring next week or whenever the good wrestler got where he could get back in the ring, Mid-South saw to him getting the bad guy back in the ring on TV and in the house shows and saw to it being done right, not like today when the Horsemen are doing whatever they want to, to any wrestlers to hurting some real bad and nothing is being done about it by the NWA. (W.K. - Wheeeeew!)

PIZZA ANYONE?

JEFF COHEN (Great Neck, NY): Although it drew mixed reviews, I have vivid recollections of taking ringside photos at the April NWA Meadowlands card: Jim Cornette glaring at me, Rick Steiner's crazy grin, and most of all, Cactus Jack holding nothing back against a heavily-bandaged Abdullah. Fans screamed "Abby, we love you!" at the Sudan wildman and I could swear he was smiling.

Going back to my first live card in 1984, also at the swamplands, the highlight was the live Piper's Pit featuring Roddy asking Salvatore Bellomo, "What are you doing here? I didn't order pizza."

TORMENT CAUSES TEARS

MIKE LANO (San Francisco, CA): My most memorable moment comes from the first match I ever attended. Bobo Brazil was hit over the head with several chairs by The Sheik at LA's Olympic Auditorium, and both had bled like crazy. Bobo, playing unconscious, was slowly carried up the aisle on a stretcher and laid down in the Olympic's lobby with fans up close and personal and played his part beautifully until the "Ambulance" came and screamed him away. I bought it and cried like all the others around me. Suspension of disbelieve at its finest, and no theatre, not even Phantom of the Opera, with Michael Crawford has ever created the emotions I felt that night and on many later nights.

I wanted to believe in the same way when I ever see Piper or hear his bagpipe music entrance. I hope new or casual fans of the nineties can get the same rush I felt in the sixties from our beloved profession of rasslin'.

"I SPEAK NO ENGLISH, REALLY"

TIM COUSAR (Burlison, TN): Mexican wrestler El Dimente Negro appearing on the Memphis show to present Lawler with a plaque which he them broke over Lawler's head before unmasking as Austin Idol...

Jimmy Valiant and Tojo Yammamoto attacking Tommy Rich's mother...

Sam Bass claiming one week that the Mongolian Stomper spoke no English and the next week The Stomper saying, "I gonna kill Jerry Lawler..."

Paul E. Dangerously's Midnight Express attacking Jim Cornette's Midnight Express in the TBS studio...

Terry Funk saying "I quit."

SECRET TO THE TAPED FIST

STEVE GENNARELLI: In 1976, at the age of 12, I became a wrestling fan. Almost immediately, family and friends warned me that it was fake, phony, fixed, you pick the term. Being 12, I defiantly believed that these naysayers were wrong. This most memorable moment recalls the night I first realized wrestling might not be on the level.

In 1977, I attended my first live card. One of the key matches was Stan Stasiak, the Heartpunch specialist vs. Ivan Putski. Much of the match had the referee attempting to check Stasiak's taped right fist. Stasiak protested vehemently whenever the referee got near. It seemed to Putski and the fans that Stasiak was concealing something in the tape. Most people assumed Brass Knucks. Anyhow the match continued and unfortunately for Stan, he lost. Being a fan of the heels even then, I approached the entrance to the dressing room to give Stan one more bit of applause. As he slowly came towards me, he began to unravel the taped fist.

Fans jeered the weary Stasiak, I just stood proud and kept clapping. Before he vanished into the night, all the tape was gone and he revealed a naked hand. No knucks. No objects whatsoever. He sneered at the fans one last time, almost to tell us: Yes you have been duped. What marks you are...

If that anecdote does not tickle your fancy, ask Wade for a refund.

HOW I BECAME A COLLEGE PROFESSOR

DOUG STALKER (Newark, DE): My most memorable moment: "My Afternoon With The Mad Dog," or "How I Missed my Calling," or "How I Became A College Professor."

In late May of 1966 I was ending my freshman year at the University of Minnesota and heading home to upstate New York for the summer. On the first leg of my journey, I sat next to Maurice "Mad Dog" Vachon. Being a fan of professional wrestling, I knew who this gentleman with the spiked beard happened to be. We spoke about professional wrestling all the way to Chicago and continued to discuss the business while we both waited to change planes. Mr. Vachon and I sat in a lounge at O'Hare Airport, he buying me drinks (7-Up for me back then), then for an hour or two I listened to a career opportunity beyond my eighteen year old imagination. Here was the AWA World Champion urging me to enter the world of professional wrestling.

I was a large fellow at the time, being a weightlifting six-footer at 252 pounds. Indeed, here was the champion extending a phenomenal offer to me. He offered to train me himself. I was to come back to Minneapolis for the summer, live with Maurice and his brother Butcher at their trailer outside of the city, and receive personal training from a headliner in the business.

When we parted for our respective flights, I had Mr. Vachon's home address in Canada and his phone number and I was to inform him about my decision.

I recall sitting back in the house in upstate New York thinking it over: How could I tell my mother that the prep school education was going by the boards? How could I stay out of the Viet Nam draft if I was not in school? How could I wrestle very well being nearsighted? How could I turn down this offer from the AWA World Champion?

I took the timid route by writing back for the summer, that I could not drop out of school, and that I would have to see how things went the coming fall at the University. I never heard from Vachon again. I tried, foolishly, to go in back to see him after a match at the St. Paul Civic Center, and of course I was stopped by the security guards.

So I continued to watch professional wrestling and I continued to go to school. Eventually I earned my Ph.D. and ended up a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Delaware. On the tedious days of teaching unmotivated students about points of logic, I truly wonder if I missed my calling. Oh where are you now, Mad Dog. Where are you, indeed? ***

("TORCH TALK: EDDIE GILBERT" continued from page 25)

So when Flair resigned as booker, I was almost ready to throw a party. Even though, there was a guy that I would have done anything for in this whole world. When I was in the UWF when he came in to defend the belt, I was the one to pick him up and be on the road with him. I thought we were close friends.

All the guys Flair surrounded himself with, I consider them followers, they're not leaders, and I consider myself a leader. I don't want to be part of anything like that. I don't want to be hanging around that office with my nose up somebody's rear end.

KELLER: AFTER FLAIR RESIGNED, DID YOU THINK YOU WERE IN LINE FOR THE BOOKING POSITION AFTER ALL YOU WENT THROUGH?

GILBERT: Well, first the new committee was formed with Funk, Cornette, Ross, Kevin, Barnett, and Herd. So Jim Ross did this for me when the committee started. I don't know if he did it because he felt guilty over what happened. Most of the committee didn't want to see Eddie Gilbert on the house shows or on TV doing anything. Well, Ross (was in charge of) TV and asked me if I thought I could have good matches with Samu. So he was the one who got me back on TV for a while.

I've always felt I was in line. But I understand what they have to go through, and they're going through the Ole thing now. I really didn't expect Ole Anderson. When he was on the committee, I just felt that they thought that he griped too much, complained, and bitched. I really felt that we would see a Bill Watts era. ***

[Editor's Note: Additional excerpts of this interview will run in future editions of Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly, including how Eddie got started in the business, how he feels pro wrestling should be covered journalistically, his thoughts on some of the top names in wrestling, and in-depth comments on the rise and sale of Bill Watts' UWF. The first part of this interview, dealing with Eddie's most recent departure from the NWA, ran in the July 5, 1990 issue, number 76.]

PREACHING TO PROMOTERS
Open Letters To Promoters

The following is a collection of open letters written by Torch Weekly readers to the promoters of wrestling today. This book, including this feature, has been forwarded to the respective promoters.

Dear Vince McMahon,

Do you remember December of 1983? You had decided that the man to build a great promotion around was Hulk Hogan. You did not have Hulk Hogan wrestle Bob Backlund for the title. Fans would not have appreciated this "newcomer" unseating their Champion. Instead, the hated Iron Sheik won the belt. The fans had a month to digest this atrocity when Hogan pinned The Sheik to become the new champion. Hogan was a hero. He had defeated the evil Iranian and the fans were happy.

In 1988 you decided that Randy Savage would be the man to replace Hogan for a while. These two men did not meet in the ring. First Andre/DiBiase won the title and then it was declared vacant. When Hogan was eliminated in the tournament, Savage was the fans' only hope. Even the Hulkamaniacs were delighted to see him win. Savage was a hero. He had defeated the evil, money-grubbing Ted DiBiase and the fans were happy.

By the time Hogan and Savage met at Wrestlemania V, Savage had become a villain. Hogan regained the title and was again a hero. And the fans were happy again.

With such a record of success, what ever possessed you to let the Ultimate Warrior win the belt from Hogan at Wrestle VI? Yes, the fans cheered. It was a great match, Hogan congratulated the Warrior and we were obviously supposed to be happy. Well, then, why are we not? Could it be because we no longer have a hero? There was no contest between good and evil. There was only a disagreement between two men who should have been friends. The Ultimate Warrior is now the champion, but he is not a hero. He did not save us from any evil and we are left unsatisfied by his victory. On the other hand we cannot hate him either, after all, he did not really do anything wrong.

I do not know who you have in mind for the next champion, although I hope that you let Hogan have it for a third time. If he is to win it from the Ultimate Warrior, then the Warrior must first turn bad. Otherwise he must first lose to someone the fans can hate. Then whoever wins next will be a hero. It worked before, remember?

Sincerely,
Elyse Zois
Union, NJ

Dear Jim Herd,

Jim, you are no Vince McMahon, Your incompetent leadership has led to the WWF maintaining dominance over the NWA. Capital Combat was a perfect example of your stupidity! Why can't that bleach blond bozo Flair do a clean job for Lex "Loser." Lex is no longer a contender to the title after losing many chances to take the strap.

Why can't I find Starrcade 89 at the local video store? This event was held in December. Are you marketing people related to the booking committee? One of the reasons the WWF is more popular is that their videos are always at the video stores and the NWA videos on Flair, Steiners, and other top stars are not.

Why was that moron "Olde" Anderson hired as booker? He will just feed us the "Four Old Men" angle and recycle old stiffs from the early eighties. Why weren't Eddie Gilbert and Paul E. Dangerously considered for booker?

El Gigante is a big stiff!!!! You should have spent the $300,000 on bringing back Muta and Ricky Steamboat. Do all of the NWA fans a favor and resign your position at once. The NWA has as much of a chance of beating the WWF as the Boston Red Sox have of winning the World Series!

Sincerely,
John Riordan
Belmont, MA

Dear Jim Herd,

Two things... Snap up Terry Taylor as soon as possible. Bring back Ricky Steamboat!

Sincerely,
Mike Pochuski

Dear Ole Anderson,

Congrats on your recent appointment as NWA booker. May I humbly suggest as publisher of "Fantasy Federation" that you concentrate your efforts with older talent, such as JYD and Orndorff, for the next couple of pay-per-views and then fade them out as you slowly build your young stars of tomorrow?

If you promote too much of the former and not enough of the latter, in six months the NWA will look like a glamorized version of the AWA. Sure, then a merger would be acceptable, but who wants to see Flair versus The Baron?

Sincerely,
Jeff Cohen
Great Neck, NY

P.S. Get a new suit, will ya?

Dear Jim Herd,

Why is it when you sent the NWA to a town like Alexandria, LA, the wrestling cards rarely come off without two or three big name "no-shows." You put in the ring instead "no name bums." When we pay to see Ric Flair, Sting, Lex Luger, and the other big names stars, we want to see them.

Maybe if you cannot deliver on the major names, you should use and advertise only "no name" wrestling stars. They will show up for a card with only 600 or 700.

Looking at it that way, it is not fair to call the "no-names" bums because they are the real wrestling stars of the NWA. They show up for less money than the big name stars who get paid when they don't.

Sincerely,
Carl D. Cook
Cheneyville, LA

Dear Ole,

We view you with trepidation and caution. The announcing changes, past poor booking and communication between front office, bookers, and workers, and the handling of Flair have been frightening. Despite the departure of Shiavone from Titan, the WWF succeeds because of perceived stability, such as stable angles, stable ownership, and direction thanks to a very aggressive McMahon. There has been no stability in the NWA. Even the name may be removed for legal reasons.

Despite what Torch columnists Ray Whebbe and Jeff Steele say, Ric Flair is the promotion. Every night, sans sleep and health, Ric gives one-hundred percent. Sure, his opposition like JYD, Rhodes, and Garvin may not be up to his level, but there are only a handful of workers out there that come close. Ric's storyboard actualized in the ring may be predictable with lesser foes, but he consistently delivers the best performance on a basis that has continued since he got out of Gagne's school. Given Flair is a better worker and overall better talker than Sting and Luger, he must not be put into demeaning angles like the centuries old prejudice angle going on with JYD as I write this.

This Gagne tainted-angle might have been non-offending in the forties through the sixties, but with all the other, more current topics to tackle, could we not have been offered both a fresh, non-prejudice type angle along with someone with some dignity and ability. JYD, for all the issues illuminated in The Torch, Observer, and Matwatch is not going to create interest in or draw against any other of the many talented workers you possess. The ability to have hard-contact, more realistic matches with better, hungrier workers is the NWA's Trump Card against Titan, so emphasize it. We already saw zero interest in fan perceived Titan-rejects like JYD, Iron Sheik, and Bob Orton last year. Fan product perception is what sells PPVs, arena shows, and souvenirs, and the 1-900 line.

If you are trying to bring 1970 back complete with the old GWC faces and angles of that era as the main focus of the NWA-forget it. That is the reason the AWA is on it s last embarrassing legs. It did not constantly grow with and reflect the changing times. Having Rich, Orndorff, and the recently departed Buzz Sawyer and Road Warriors (big, dumb loss here), Stan Hansen, Abby, Wrestling II, and JYD are fine provided you blend them effectively and creatively with the new guys (Sting, Luger, Express, Steiners) and emphasize everyone, especially the new young talent equally. Runnels and Crockett blew it with not putting the UWF guys over. You run that same risk by failing to continue to push Pillman, Zenk, and Norman who are already over. One surprise was the Rock & Roll Express who, although a stale gimmick, worked very hard and their

ability overcame their oldness. Their gimmick too was more palatable and believable than Jim Herd's Dynamic Dudes, Ding Dongs, etc. which have failed. Jim Herd should be kept at Bay as much as possible, especially since the Connie Chung piece showed him to be the bizarro-Einstein of wrestling booking decisions and things to push. While keeping Herd away, please swallow your pride and get creative input from Eddie Gilbert, Paul Dangerously, Jim Cornette, and Bill Watts. If you want this promotion to succeed and stop losing millions, you will have to get their grey matter on the table. It is definitely more precious than gold for the NWA now.

I agree that you should be given at least until December to turn things around with the full support of Herd, Petrick, and Turner. What you do with the future and present will forever change history and if you succeed may all of us eat our hats and salute you, partner!

Dr. Mike Lano,
San Francisco, CA

Dear Ted Turner and Jim Herd,

I do not know exactly when this will be printed, but if Ric Flair is still champion at this time, then it is time for a change. I would say that right now the best choice is probably Sting as it has already been planted in our minds that Lex Luger is not going to get the title. In order to be perceived as the actual champion, whoever wins must keep the title for more than the customary sixty days or less. The champion will not draw well if the fans feel that he is only holding the belt to give Flair a breather. And for heaven's sake, if you you cannot bear to have Flair's name removed from the belt, get a new one made! How would you like to wear a title belt with someone else's name on it?

Next, stop turning Lex Luger, it confuses the fans. No, the hardcore fans probably will not care. They will still come out no matter what. It is the not-so-hardcore fans you have to attract. Luger has the makings of a superhero if properly handled.

Racist remarks are not helping you. Yes, it is very commendable that you have black tag team champions. Now shut up about it because we get the idea that that is the only reason they have the straps. And get Flair to quit saying that he will never let a black man beat him for the title. Yes, the WWF does have blacks in stereotypical roles, but they do not verbally acknowledge it and neither should you.

Stop ruining gimmicks. A cage match is designed to prevent outside interference. If you are going to have interference anyway, forget the cage. Otherwise you kill its usefulness.

Last, but far from least, those pay-per-views cost money. There is a limit to the number of screw job finishes the fans are willing to pay for. In my opinion, you are getting close.

Sincerely,
Elyse Zois
Union, NJ

Dear Vince McMahon,

Vince, you are a disgrace to the sport of professional wrestling. Your portrayal of wrestlers as musclebound steroid chomping morons has poisoned the sport in most people's eyes. Hulk Hogan was the worst WWF Champion of all time. In every one of his matches he would win with that stupid legdrop and a three count. The movie "Both Heads Bald" showed the world Hogan is a worse actor than a wrestler.

Jake "The Snake" Roberts and Koko "The Birdman" angles were and still are one of the worst things to happen to wrestling in this decade. There is no place in a wrestling ring for animals.

Your racist portrayal of black wrestlers is an insult to all black athletes in this country. Bad News Brown, Koko "The Birdman," Junkfood Dog, Zeus all show the white wrestling fans that black wrestlers are inferior to white wrestlers and make it very hard for fans to believe a black wrestler could be a world champion.

You should step down as a TV announcer because you truly suck. The only reason I watch the WWF TV shows is because of the excellent job done by Jesse Ventura. Mean Gene Okerlund, Gorilla Monsoon, and Lord Alfred Hayes are the only announcer that are worse than you are.

If you are truly concerned with the image that your wrestlers are giving to the young fans of the WWF, you would order all wrestlers to be tested for steroids. This will not happen as Hulk Hogan, Anabolic Warrior, Demolition, Dino Bravo, The Legion of Doom, and Powers of Pain are all suspect.

The NBC Saturday Night's Main Event show is a big disappointment due to your continuous pushing of Hulk Hogan on this show. Why didn't you call the show "Hulk Hogan's Main Event with a big leg drop finish?"

Do all the wrestling fans a favor and sell the WWF to someone who knows wrestling and will treat the wrestling fan as a valued customer and not as stupid morons ready to be fleeced.

Sincerely,
John Riordan
Belmont, MA

Dear Jack Petrick,

Greetings. As an NWA fan and follower of wrestling in general, here are some suggestions for you to kick around.

1) Tape the Omni shows like McMahon does MSG's. Run angles there on occasion and air them as inserts on the syndies or TBS.

2) Re-define what each of our TV wrestling shows should be. Saturday's TBS show is the "A" program. Just one complaint with the current format. Too many senseless long matches. The average fan does not care to see Hulk Hogan more than ten minutes, much less the Samoans. There is no reason for a free TV bout to go more than nine or ten minutes. Sunday's "Main Event" show should air first run matches from house shows, such as from the Omni. Friday's Power Hour should revert to a magazine format. Add more features on the personalities, add wrestling music videos, air less matches here.

3) The syndicated programs must have an identity separate from the TBS product. The recent Funk/Cruise pairing gave identity to "World Wide." Form a team of announcers, two or possibly three to a show, and stick with the pairings for a few months.

4) With injuries and an ever changing roster, it is difficult to plan for the future. I suggest a constant six month plan which would determine scenarios for PPV's and house shows. Plan for the unexpected. In addition to good wrestling and a hot crowd, the better PPV's have two key elements: Conclusions to feuds; Origins of new feuds.

Best of luck and thanks for your considerations.

Sincerely
Steve Gennarelli
Binghampton, NY ***

What's Out There

BY: STEVE GERBER

The Torch's Video Tape Review

"The Toon Wrestling Federation" Presents... "TOONMANIA I: CELLULOID ON PARADE;" available on BETA from Warner Step-Brothers Communication Gap; 1313 Animation Street; Toontown, USA 911911; retail cost $12.34.

Why settle for cheap imitations? Why only venture halfway when you can have the "real thing?" Now is your chance to order the Toon Wrestling Federation video tape extravaganza: Toonmania I - Celluloid on Parade! See the original, inimitable toon stars at their finest! Thrill to these exciting matches:

In a special arm wrestling challenge, Popeye will take on He-Man. Due to problems between these two in the past, Spinach and broadswords will be banned from ringside! This was an exciting contest as these two musclemen were never able to settle their differences due to outside interference on behalf of He-Man and his friend. During this contest, Brutis, Wimpy, Olive Oil, and Sweet Pea surround the table to protect Popeye from Skeletor and the others.

The next match-up pits Garfield against Heathcliff in a "Loser Eats Dogfood" bout. This was the ultimate in humiliation for one of these furry, finicky felines. The contest deserves ***3/4.

The third event features an "Acme Death Match" between Wile E. Coyote and The Road Runner. This features plenty of "international acme objects" to be used throughout this bout! Special rules dictated that this was a "fight to the finish," with the vanquished being left in the ring. At that point, a sixteen ton weight was dropped from the arena ceiling onto the unfortunate foe. Order the tape to find out who was the victim.

A cage match between Rocket J. (Rocky) Squirrel and Mighty Mouse was next on this tremendous video tape available exclusively to Torch Annual readers! The lucky viewer will be treated to lots of "flying maneuvers" from these two combatants. This cage match was necessitated due to an earlier altercation wherein Bullwinkel interfered with the outcome. As you fans know, Bullwinkel is a member of the dreaded "Four Moosemen," and frequently comes to the aid of his toon pals.

The main event is a "Wabbit Stew Match" between Roger Rabbit and Bugs Bunny! This ultimate in confrontations features special guest referee Elmer Fudd! Special conditions dictate that the loser was to be boiled in a pot of vegetables previously prepared by Elmer.

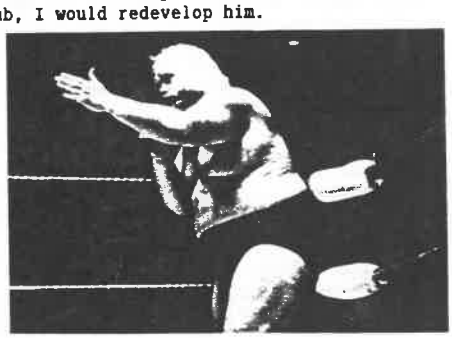
Do not miss out on this special offer only available to Torch Weekly subscribers and Torch ANNUAL readers. Do not be left out! Highest recommendation. ***

READERS' BOOKING IDEAS

For the third year in a row, TorchReaders have contributed their ideas for gimmicks, feuds, and everything else that goes into wrestling. Some are humorous while others are very sincere. Some of the ideas may become reality through coincidence and some directly because of what is written. Read on and see if you agree that the following booking ideas would be good ones...

GUEST BOOKER - DOUG STALKER: A modest booking idea, "The Playboy Goes on a Diet."

Instead of looking for a cosmic booking idea that will turn a promotion around or create the next mega/ultimate/total star in the business, let me make a modest suggestion about helping to redevelop some existing talent in order to make the middle of a card more interesting. Buddy Rose used to be a headliner in the AWA and out in Portland. I, for one, have always thought he was a talented person with a good range of abilities. And now where is he? Doing jobs in the WWF, sad to say. And has gained more than a little weight, apparently going over the 300 mark these days. Instead of having Rose languish as a scrub, I would redevelop him.



BUDDY ROSE (WK)

He used to work an angle around his bodyweight. "Not 271 pounds. I weigh 217!" Now is the time to put Buddy Rose on an official diet by bringing out the scale and monitoring his progress as the weeks go by. Other wrestlers can taunt him with baking goods; they can even slap him silly with cakes and pies in the ring in order to work up the interest. The one drawback is that a real diet takes some time to kick in; I do not know how fast Rose can drop weight, or let alone if he would agree to. But for his health's sake and his career's sake, I would like to see Rose turn things around, and when the announcers poke fun at his size nowadays... well, there is the obvious angle and solution.

It is a shame to have his talent go to waste. They could even add in a diet doctor to enforce the diet, to do the monitoring, indeed to come out of the front row and insist that Rose is throwing his life down the garbage disposal and digging his grave with a knife and fork.

Let me be the first to volunteer to be his diet doctor because I am a Buddy Rose fan and probably know as much as anyone about your local diet center to boot.

GUEST BOOKER - ELYSE ZOIS: In the WWF, I would have Bobby Heenan help Rick Rude win the World Title at Summerslam 90. He would hold the title through the fall and early winter, defending against the top babyfaces as well as having rematches against the Ultimate Warrior. This would give the fans the idea that one of their favorites could possibly win. We have not had babyface contenders in over six years except for the Wrestlemania IV tournament. It would also allow Heenan to gloat, something he does very well.

I would have Hulk Hogan destroy Earthquake at Summerslam. After he worked his way back to the top, so to speak, I would have Hogan defeat Rude for the title on the main event to become our new "living legend."

I would have The Legion of Doom, managed by Slick, defeat Demolition to become the new tag team champions. They deserve it and it would give The Rockers, Demolition, and the Hart Foundation someone to feud with instead of each other.

I would have Mr. Perfect hold on to the Intercontinental belt without help from Heenan. He is a great wrestler and I see no reason to turn him into another version of The Honkeytonk Man.

I am perfectly happy with Randy Savage as King. He knows what to do and needs no help from me.

In the NWA, I would make Sting the new NWA World Champion. Lex Luger was my first choice, but I do not think the fans will pay $14.95 to see another Flair-Luger match. Luger can remain the US Champion a while longer. He has the making of a superhero and can work with Sting to "clean up the NWA." It will not kill them to have babyface champions for a while. Who knows, the ratings may go up. I would also have a new belt made - one without everyone's name on it - to eliminate the idea that he has just borrowed it for a while.

In the AWA I really can't figure out just what it is that they need. But then, neither can Verne.

GUEST BOOKER - TIM COUSAR: During the Robin Green angle, I was sure they were leading to a feud between the Steiner Brothers. Think how stiff such matches could be. Remember Scott's black eye? A series of matches could build heat, especially if they traded doing the job.

Jim Ross keeps saying Mike Rotunda was trained by Dick Beyer - put Rotunda under the mask as the New Destroyer, push him, and market the character.

Tighten up the rules and let them go at it for real.

GUEST BOOKER - TIM COUSAR: In the NWA, big pushes for Hansen, Orndorff, and Scott Steiner. When Sting wrestles Flair on PPV in July, have Sting win big and quickly. Essentially an eight minute squash match. The fans deserve something. While Hansen and possibly Big Van Vader have a place near the top, I see room in the NWA for Owen Hart, Chris Benoit, and graduates of Lucha Libre (Conan?). I would phase out The Midnight Express, but not Jim Cornette, along with Jimmy Garvin, Ton Zenk, The Samoans, and Bob Caudle. New tag teams would include Rotunda & David Sammartino, Rick Steiner & Norman. When Eddie Gilbert returns, I would push him and Missy using their old UWF heel personas. Lastly, I would attempt to re-acquire any of the following three: Rick Steamboat, The Great Muta, Terry Funk. Each one of these men could add much to what the NWA is, but getting two or all three would be a coup. If all else fails, try to steal Wayne Ferris from the Fed to play Ric Flair's pal and protector.

In the WWF, give Randy Savage two to three months off. He can still play a major role in the future, but he has gotten stale in unending feuds with Rhodes and Duggan. I would start phasing out Bravo, Demolition, Akeem, Hercules, Haku, and The Warlord. Fans are just plain tired of seeing them. I would bring back Demo Darsow under a different guise. At the head of the must-go list is Brother Love. Vince's contempt for the audience character was amusing for a few weeks, but this is his third year for Pete's sake. Regarding managers, I would keep Heenan and Sherri. The others would be shifted to the front office or simply phased out. Possible replacements, Genius Poffo or USWA's Terrence Garvin.

As for angles, on Update I would announce that Hillbilly Jim fell down an elevator shaft. I would have his hair trimmed and then return him to the audience from whence he came. He instantly becomes Rhythm and Blues' Number One Roadie and Bodyguard. I would turn both Jake Roberts, who is much better as a heel, and DiBiase, whose gimmick's usefulness ended a year and a half ago. I would bring in a voluptuous woman to be Rick Martel's valet and manager. The poor guy needs more than arrogance in a can. Have more face versus face and heel versus heel bouts.

GUEST BOOKER - MIKE POCHUSKI: 1) Turn Hansen babyface. He is tough. He has no friends. But he is no wimp and does not need any back-up, so he should start bad-mouthing the "Four Horsemen" for always ganging up on one person. Before getting to Flair, can you imagine Hansen versus Windham, Hansen versus Vicious, and Hansen versus Arn to start. And then finally Hansen versus Flair.

Somewhere along the line, Hansen could be worked over to the point of being bloody and someone like Paul Orndorff could come in and help along with Sting and Luger. Hansen could act puzzled, stare at them for a while, the camera could zoom in for a close-up and he could give a quick nod of thanks and leave quickly. A week later on TV you could have an angle where Orndorff wrestles Arn for the TV belt, have Windham and Vicious come out to jump Orndorff. A minute later Sting and JYD could come out to even the score. However, a minute later, Flair comes out with...

his famous baseball bat and knocks out all of the faces. While all the faces are being stomped by The Horsemen and still being hit with the baseball bat. Hansen then comes running out with his cowbell and starts cleaning house. I feel certain the house would pop.

2) I would have Tommy Rich turn heel. I have read that he makes an excellent heel, so team him with Buddy Landel as The Southern Blond Bombers. Feud them with the "Wild Eyes Southern Boys" trying to prove who is the toughest Southern wrestling tag team. By this time, The Southern Boys could have won the US Tag belts from the Midnight Express and we could have a tag title feud.

3) I would have Doom pick a fight with JYD by making fun of his big belly. Since they are built like Road Warriors, it would be a "brain" versus brawn battle. Yeah, I know JYD doesn't stand a chance.

GUEST BOOKER - JOHN RIORDAN: 1) Have Flair drop the strap to Sting at the next PPV. Then have Sid Vicious break away from The Horsemen and become a killer heel. Vicious could then pummel that wimp Sting and become the new NWA Champion. This would set up a Vicious-Luger angle as the battle of the monsters.

2) Bring back Terry Funk as an active wrestler for an angle with Stan Hansen. I would have Hansen call Funk a loser and a disgrace to the state of Texas for losing to that beach blond bozo Flair. You could then have a battle for the state of Texas. The angle would conclude on a PPV card with a Texas death match between Hansen and Funk with

TERRY FUNK piledrives RIC FLAIR (WK)

plenty of juice, chairs, bullropes, and fighting in the stands. The end of the match would see both wrestlers collapse and be carried back to the locker room.

3) Have Teddy Long and Doom do an interview on World Wide Wrestling insulting blue collar workers, especially the construction workers. They could call them "Morons" and say any imbecile could be a construction worker but only a select few people like Doom could be pro wrestlers. Then have the Destruction Crew come out and challenge Doom to a match. Then there would be a brawl on the set which would set up the angle with Doom and Destruction Crew. This would establish the Destruction Crew as the working man's tag team.

4) The NWA should hire Eddie Gilbert and Paul E. Dangerously to be co-bookers. They both have had success in Independent Federations - Eddie in the CWF and Paul in the ICW. By hiring two of the finest young minds in the business, the NWA would get away from the "Four Old Men" angle that should be given its last rites.

5) For Starrcade 90, the NWA should do a joint card with Japan. You could have Gordy & Williams versus Vicious & Windham, Kroffat & Furnas versus The Steiners, Tenyru versus Flair, and Muta versus Pillman.

6) The NWA should strike an agreement with the USWA or Portland to become a training ground for future NWA wrestlers. This would prevent the recycling of "Losers" like Flabdullah, Junkfood Dog, Ock & Oll Distress, and Mr. Blunderful. Wrestling fans like to see new talent and not be clubbed over the head with the same old stiffs.

7) Run an angle where Rick Steiner demands that Barry Windham pay him the $20.00 that he is owed. Barry then gives Rick a counterfeit twenty that Rick accepts gladly. have Rick walk in the store and buy a newspaper and give the store clerk the counterfeit twenty. The clerk will recognize the phony money and call the cops. Rick will then be arrested by the police. On World Wide Wrestling show Rick behind bars telling everybody that Barry gave him the money and he will get even when he gets out of jail. This would set up a hot feud between Rick and Barry where Barry could win a few of the matches when he uses the "Plates" to smash Rick over his moron head and pin him.

8) Have Kevin Sullivan bring back Ricky Steamboat as his newest find. Sullivan would do interviews wearing a black hood and saying that Steamboat sold his "Soul" to come back to the NWA to fight Flair. Sullivan would say that Steamboat has been to the seven steps of the Buddadin and has met the Lady of the Lake and no one will stop him. This would bring back Steamboat as a heel, not a goody two shoes wimp and reignite the classic Flair-Steamboat feud that most NWA fans would pay to see.

9) Have Tully Blanchard return to the NWA as a babyface. Tully would do an interview saying he wanted

TULLY BLANCHARD (WK)

revenge on the Horsemen for deserting him in favor of Sid Vicious. This would set up a hot tag feud with Blanchard and Sting up against Arn and Flair. Tully could also demand an NWA TV Title match against Arn Anderson that would draw some heat.

10) Bring in Larry Cameron as a heel. He would go on TV saying that "Junkfood" Dog is a disgrace to all black wrestlers and he will end his career. Larry would then pummel that fat piece of garbage into a bloody pulp and effectively end his worthless career.

11) The proper way to set up the Big Bossman-Ted DiBiase feud: Have Ted DiBiase hire someone who looks like the Bossman to don a prison guard uniform and patrol the Cobb County prison. Then, show this Bossman imitator beating up a prisoner with his nightstick. Later in the segment, have an interview with the beaten prisoner. The prisoner would then take off his shirt to show the welts on his back. DiBiase would then threaten to take this evidence to the district attorney and have the Bossman arrested. This would enrage the Bossman and he would demand a match with DiBiase. The match would have the following stipulations: The loser of the match would have to spend a day in the Cobb County Prison lockup.

12) On the Superstars of Wrestling show, Dusty Rhodes sitting in a Dunkin Donuts stuffing his fat face. Then have Randy Savage drive up in his car. The Macho Man would then enter the store from the back and sneak attack fat Dusty. Macho Man would destroy the fat slob. He would hit him over the head with a chair, throw coffee in his face and then would drag Dusty into the men's room. Savage would then stick Dusty's fat face in the toilet and then flush it! Vince would say on the following week's show thus far Dusty has suffered career ending injuries and his WWF career is over. This would be the way to rid the wrestling fans of the American Disgrace forever.

GUEST BOOKER - JEFF COHEN: The WWF is boring. Admit it. Why should anyone care about The Bushwackers, Dino Bravo, Brutis Beefcake, The Warlord, The Ultimate Warrior, or Akeem? They have some legitimate superstars with The Hart Foundation, Ted DiBiase, Curt Hennig, The Rockers, Randy Savage, and the "world-renowned" Legion of Doom. But would you really pay to see them fight Rhythm & Blues, Dusty Rhodes, Bad News Brown, Hercules, or Tugboat?

There really is no reason to raid the NWA or any other promotion with all the available independent talent. Why all the grumbling about Earthquake as the top heel? He is unbeaten and weighs a ton, two tremendous attributes in the Titan scheme of things.

Put me in charge of booking, Vince, and I would sign up Ricky Steamboat and Larry Cameron, a face and a heel. I would work both in hot feuds with Ted DiBiase and The Big Bossman, respectively. Ted is on the downside, so another pin by Ricky cannot damage him and beating The Bossman after his push would give Cameron credibility as a heel.

Now you can book Steamboat against Hennig for the Intercontinental belt and a hot angle with Cameron versus Warrior would forestall the inevitable Hogan-Warrior rematch, now set for Wrestlemania VII.

What, neither strikes your fancy? Okay, how about Nikita Koloff and Scotty the Body? Ah! Made you look! ***

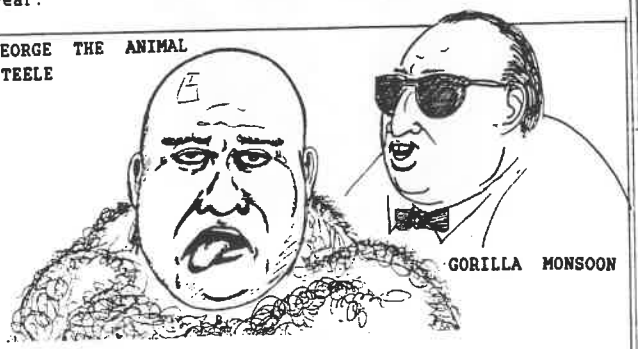
PRO WRESTLING
TORCH WEEKLY'S JAPAN COLUMNIST
JEFF BOWDREN'S "HIGHSPOTS"
TORCH WEEKLY

COMING ATTRACTIONS. . .

SPECIAL TO THE TORCH:
TEXT BY ERNIE SANTILLI

ILLUSTRATED BY MR. MIKE

With the likes of Terry Funk, Hulk Hogan, Roddy Piper, and Jesse Ventura crossing over to performances in mainstream movies, a number of Hollywood producers have jumped on the bandwagon to sign wrestlers to film contracts. The following movies are in production and should be at theatres and in video stores by the end of the year.



GEORGE THE ANIMAL STEELE

GORILLA MONSOON

THE ANIMAL'S HOUSE: Kooky campus comedy with the President (Joe Blanchard) and the Dean (Gordon Solie) plot to expel George Steele's fraternity house. With Red Rooster, Junkyard Dog, Grizzly Boone, Hawk, The British Bulldogs, Gorilla Monsoon, and Kat LeRoux. Soundtrack by the Pet Shop Boys.

DEBBIE DOES DALLAS: In an attempt to cash in on the second wave of "rock 'n wrestling" hype the USWA pushes Debbie Gibson as its women's champion. Naturally, she is a face in Texas, a heel in Memphis, and loses and regains the Unified Women's Title every other week.

BIG TOP & PEE WEE: Missy Hyatt and Lord Littlebrook play private eyes who must solve the baffling mystery of why anyone believed the appearance of a Cyborg, from the future no less, was going to convince casual fans to take a wrestling promotion seriously.

SID VICIOUS

SID AND NANCY: Mr. Vicious and Ms. Angel-Duas-Sullivan star as the musician and girlfriend in the vanguard of a new sound sensation known as "punch rock." Sid is a horrible bass player, but who wants to tell him?

HAIR: Gene Okerlund, Bill Apter, Buzz Sawyer, Bugsy McGraw, and Baron Von Raschke star in a sixties musical featuring the songs, "Hang on Toupee," "California Curls," and "Bald to be Wild." With Debbie Combs.

MY DINNER WITH ANDRE: Bad News Brown and Andre the Giant are having a marvelous evening eating everything on a gourmet restaurant's menu until the Harlemite goes into cardiac arrest after being served a plate of eels. Featuring Jake Roberts as the waiter.

ABDUALLAH THE BUTCHER

BLADE RUNNER: Carlos Colon and Abdullah the Butcher are co-owners of the wackiest store in the Hemisphere. This daffy duo slash their prices... and their foreheads! Theme song by Juice Newton.

SLICK

AFRICAN QUEEN: This time Slick is the one struck by lightning, causing him to think he is Adrian Street's long-lost brother. The conflict is, should they sink a Nazi sub or steal those smashing uniforms?

THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIS: Documentary - Chris Cruise, fed up with Kevin Sullivan's needlingandalready fired snaps out and challenges the Bostonian to a death match. Lots of interviews with Crispy's new friends in the medical profession.

TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH: The Iron Sheik and Jim Duggan drive down the New Jersey Turnpike at noon.

LIFE AND TIMES OF GRIZZLY ADAMS: A zany comedy about the hilarious homelife of Jeannie, Toni, and Chris Adams as seen through the eyes of their pet bear. Bottoms up!

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS II: Tourist Stan, Bobby and James are imprisoned when one of them is caught attempting to smuggle jokes into Turkey via a tennis racket with a false bottom.

AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS: Bashful Buddy Landel in an adventure yarn concerning a traveller attempting to set a record by no-showing every promotion on Earth in under three months.

BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET: Johnny V's scheme to inherit the Valiant family fortune goes awry upon the appearance of a mysterious eccentric calling himself The Boogie Man, claiming to be the Luscious One's sibling.

MAN OF A THOUSAND FACES: Jack Victory takes over the role of Gary Coleman's brother on this TV movie based on the program Different Strokes. JV also appears as the maid, stepsister, Mr. Drummond, and musical guests, The Kingston Trio.

LARRY ZBYSZKO

DIRTY LARRY: Mr. Zbyszko moonlights as an unorthodox detective while defending the prestigious AWA Championship. "You feel lucky? Well do you, spudhead?" Running time: Two glorious hours.

CAMELOT: Sheik Adnan El-Kaissey returns to his homeland to try his hand at selling used pachyderms to the locals.

RETURN OF THE DRAGON: Lawyer Ricky Steamboat is hired to do battle with one competitor, gets involved with another, but the film ends before the second plot line can be resolved. Based on a true story.

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN: In gratitude for the superb p.r. job he has done for New York City, the mayor awards the Park Commissioner post to Steve Lombardi.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: Due to the ban on the use of a certain word on a large cable web, a noted rock group ponders whether they should change their name to "Internationaler" in order to get their video aired on TBS' "Night Tracks."

BILLY JACK GOES TO PORTLAND: A peacekeeping roughneck mean after Oregonians' apathy forces his commune into bankruptcy. BJ vainly struggles to recoup a portion of his losses by selling something known as Clean Pinfalls, a product unfamiliar to most Portland residents.

FISTFULL OF DOLLARS: New Englander Vince will not rest until he signs every runner in the Boston Marathon to a contract. His "Ultimate Plan" is to shorten the race to thirty years so his prize runner can complete the course.

NORMAN, IS THAT YOU? Study of a schizophrenic whose personalities include Ninja Turtle, artist, cowboy, lunatic, Gilligan, Makhan Singh, and Mike Shaw.

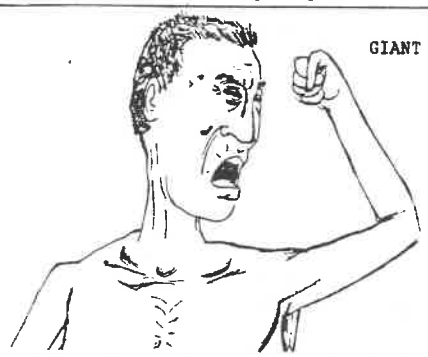
TEXAS CLOTHESLINE MASSACRE: Upon receiving french fries instead of the corn he ordered, a berserk cowboy destroys a diner, screaming, "Nobody potatoes me!" at the top of his lungs. Texas Ranger El Gigante cannot identify the man because he hasn't got a clue.

TED TURNER

BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE: Messrs. Watts and Turner travel back in time so Ted can buy the American UWF instead of signing John Konchak.

SOMEBODY UP THERE LIKES ME: An assistant D.A. shocks the community when he declares Rocky Bravo's fatal plunge from a Canadian balcony was a homicide and not suicide as originally suspected. Insiders find it hard to believe the man was pushed.

COME FLY WITH ME: Jushin Riger, Lizmark, Tiger Mask, Owen Hart, and Atlantis go airborne nonstop from Boston to San Francisco. On the return trip they use an airplane.



GIANT BABA

TWINS: Itzi and Izzy (Giant Baba and Jake Milliman) are indentical brothers hunted by a hitman (Bret Hart) in the employ of the President of the neo-fascist Radical Purity League (Col. DeBeers).

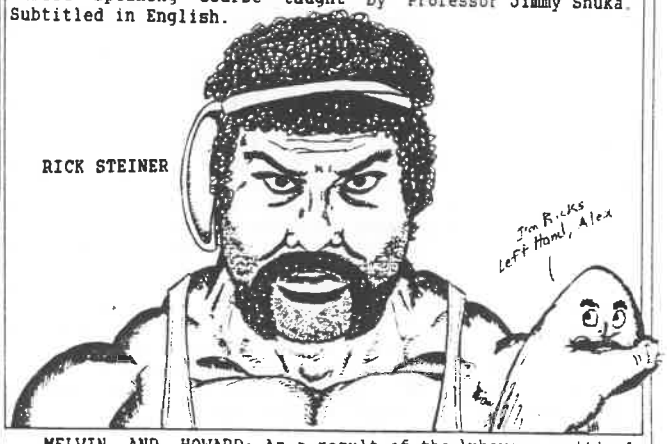
SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER: World War II actioner toplining Sherri Martel portraying an Allied spy who overthrows the Third Reich utilizing a miniskirt and loaded purse. Co-starring Jack Tunney as the fictional president.

DUSTY RHODES

BATMAN: Gotham City cop Dusty Rhodes gets suspended from the force after accidentally hitting Commissioner Crockett while attempting to save a pal from a baseball bat assault. In an effort to hide his identity behind a mask and juiced-up body, Dusty returns as the bat-weilding Midnight 'Roider.

JIMMY SNUKA

THE CONVERSATION: Mr. Fuji, Rick Steiner, Jim Hellwig, Kerry Von Erich, and Tommy Rich attend a night school Public Speaking course taught by Professor Jimmy Snuka. Subtitled in English.



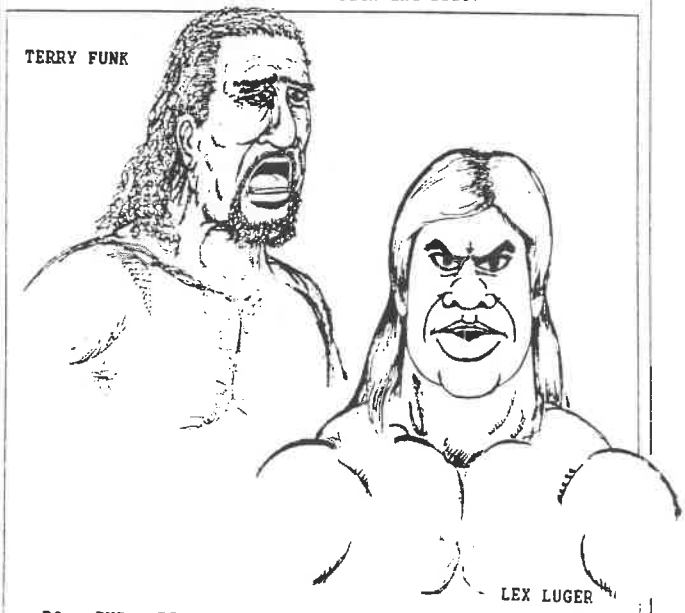
RICK STEINER

MELVIN AND HOWARD: As a result of the lukewarm critical response to his last few releases, Mel Brooks hired Howard Finkel to announce his next picture at the press screening.

ADAM'S RIB: The Pope grants Jim Herd permission to use Biblical characters in the ring. Trouble starts when The Burning Bush accidentally ignites a locker room at the Omni.

2001: A RACE ODYSSEY: After sixty years of being portrayed as a back-jumping, salt-throwing, torture-loving heel an Oriental finally gets a face push by a radical promoter at the turn of the millennium. NOT starring P.Y. Chu Hi.

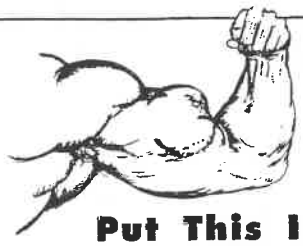
MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH: David Bowie stars in a drama detailing the up and down career of Lee Scott. Running time: two minutes. Filmed in black and blue.



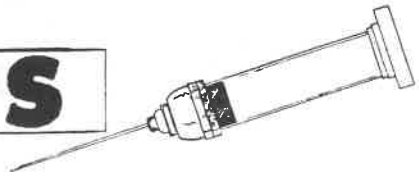
TERRY FUNK

LEX LUGER

DO THE RIGHT THING: The council of Turnervania uncharacteristically bows to public opinion and appoints Friar Luger as the new King instead of former frontrunner Town Crier Sting. In a flashback sequence - Sting's downfall comes when the party committee recalls how previous candidate The Funker needed support but the painted delegate refused to do the job. ***



STEROIDS



SPECIAL TO THE TORCH
BY PAUL J. MACARTHUR

Put This In Your Arm And We Will Make You A Star

Wrestling Observer editor Dave Meltzer, "It takes a pretty hardcore fan to detect nuances and subtleties, but even the densest mark knows a great physique when he sees it.

The problem of steroid abuse is not unique to wrestling. Steroids have been used in football for the past twenty years. Former football great Lyle Alzado stated that just about every football player he knew used the drug. The Olympics and other international "amateur" sporting events have seen records shattered and subsequently annulled from the record books by athletes who were discovered to be steroid users.

Steroid use has created a serious problem in professional and amateur sports as its side effects are becoming more prevalent. Much like the man who smoked in the 1940's did not know he was destroying his lungs, the athletes who used steroids in the late 60's through late 70's were unaware they were destroying their lives, joints, kidneys, reproductive systems, and possibly other parts of their anatomy. In the late 80's, like cigarettes in the 60's, the long-term side effects of steroids were discovered and documented and continue to grow in the early 80's.

Wrestling, however, finds itself in a unique situation. In football, track and field, baseball, and most every other professional sport, athletes rise to the top of their profession based on ability. The strikeout wizard on the sand lot who can translate that to the minor league and the majors will, eventually, command a good salary. The same analogy works for the playground quarterback who can throw a winning play in every game. In professional wrestling amateur wrestling ability is not a prerequisite. Those who rise to the top of their profession, do so because they have enough charisma to draw a crowd, regardless if they can wrestle, or because they are given a push by the promoter. In wrestling, there is a gatekeeper for the talent and political battles can have a far greater effect on a wrestler's career than most professional athletes.

In professional sports, precision sports aside, the athletes who use steroids do so because it offers them a competitive advantage over their colleagues. Eventually, those who use steroids become dominant and those who do not either start using the drug or retire. Few athletes are gifted enough to compete without the use of the drug.

Wrestling faces a similar dilemma: In order to be pushed, they must either be so spectacular that they draw a crowd based on their ability alone or they must fit the physical mold the top promoter in the business has determined will draw a crowd. Regrettably, the top promoter has determined that chemically enhanced bodies are the best way to promote wrestling. Further proof of this fact is his recent decision to replace Hulk Hogan as champion with The Ultimate Warrior, a man known in wrestling circles as The Anabolic Warrior, a man who was told by a wrestling promoter to stop using steroids in 1986. Instead, he quit that promotion, became a star making over six figures a year, and represents the World Wrestling Federation by holding its World Championship with an ill-conditioned, steroid-ridden body. An important footnote to this situation is that Jim Helwig is considered to be a terrible wrestler.

Such a situation begs two questions: Realizing the health risks created by steroids, can wrestling promoters in good conscience continue to promote men whose physiques are chemically enhanced? If not, how can a complete turnaround be done?

The wrestling promoter has a few arguments for his cause:

1) The fans have determined with their money what they want to see and they have chosen to see musclemen over "normal" wrestling. How the wrestler achieves these appearances is of no concern to the promoter.

2) There is no steroid testing system that cannot be beaten, and without direct evidence, who is to know who is taking steroids and who has an excellent workout regime and dietary plan.

3) An offshoot of number one, the decision to use steroids is a personal one, much like the decision to smoke or drink alcohol. It is not the responsibility of the promoter to babysit its employees.

Beyond these arguments, and they are easily refuted, there is little to defend a promoter's choice to push a chemically enhanced person.

Perhaps the most troublesome argument is the first one which says the fans have decided what they want to see. It is well known that the insurgence of steroid use in the business paralleled Vince McMahon's decision to push primarily "larger than life" wrestlers, many of whom have been marketed so heavily for the past five years that the fans have become conditioned to expect these types of wrestlers. Were McMahon to push a wrestler without a body builder physique, it is very possible based on his past successes as a promoter, he could make that wrestler a star. McMahon has shown no interest in doing this. Instead, he continues to push men who will be feeling the side effects from the drug ten, twenty, and thirty years down the road.

What reason could he have for doing this? After all, as steroid side effects become more and more apparent it would only be prudent for the promoter to do whathecanto keep his wrestler away from the drug. But wrestlers rarely work for a particular promoter for more than five years. Since a wrestler is not going to be working for him when the side effects take place, why would McMahon care? After all, he made money from them, their health was their own concern.

In a way, McMahon has created his own version of the NCAA. In the NCAA, the athletes are used for four years. A small percentage of the "college" athletes become successful in the professional ranks of their chosen sport. The rest are forgotten. During the four-year period "college" athletes compete in the NCAA, they are put on schedules that make it difficult, if not impossible, to receive a quality education. Ten, twenty, and thirty years down the road, the athletes feel the long-term effects of the NCAA's professional coaches and staffs making money at the expense of their education.

In the WWF, McMahon uses a wrestler for about two to five years. A small percentage remain with McMahon for over five years. A few who retire obtain front office jobs. The rest are forgotten. To be successful during the two to five year period McMahon uses him, the wrestler is under an enormous amount of pressure to use steroids. Most will use the drug in order to be successful in McMahon's promotion. Ten, twenty, and thirty years down the road, the wrestlers feel the long-term effects of McMahon's promotional concepts at the expense of their physical well-being.

This is not to excuse the wrestler for taking steroids. The ultimate responsibility in this decision is his. It is the wrestler who injects the fluid into his arm and feels the immediate benefits and long-term side effects.

Therein lies a deeper problem. The wrestler who uses steroids and trains with conviction finds himself with a phenomenal build. He also may find himself being pushed to the top of the promotion for which he works. Two major benefits occur immediately. The side effects, like those associated with cigarettes, do not occur until ten, twenty, or thirty years down the road. With some, they may never occur. The wrestler is playing a form of Russian Roulette. He can take the drug, reap the professional benefits and pray he does not have the long-term effects or he can not take the drug and rely on his ring ability to get pushed. This is a difficult decision as his chances of being pushed are severely diminished without the drug. He has a third option. It is the same one as his football colleagues: retire.

Do we not feel sorry for these individuals as they command six figure salaries with their bodies? After all, the side-effects of steroids, like cigarettes, are documented. If one chooses to take the risk and make a large salary in the process, why should society care? It is the classic risk versus return analogy with the risk being abstract and the return almost immediate. Further, what more can society do? Steroids are illegal and few outside the sporting world would encourage their illegal use.

There are a few solutions, but they are by no means simple and they require discipline. Some proposed solutions are as follows:

1) WWF Responsibility - This is the simplest solution. McMahon chooses to push wrestlers based on ability rather than size. It would represent a complete turnaround in McMahon's promotional philosophy, but as the number one promoter in the country, it would be successful. McMahon has succeeded in making wrestlers who do not use steroids

successful, but for some reason, he has decided to make them the exception rather than the rule. As the top promoter, his influence is tremendous. Should he decide to be responsible, it would only be natural for other promoters to follow his lead. McMahon will not take the economic chance, so, regrettably, this probably will not happen soon.

2) Smaller Promotions Refuse To Hire Steroid Users - This creates a problem. By using smaller wrestlers, the small promotions put themselves at a competitive disadvantage with the federation that has the largest exposure and the most sophisticated marketing plan. But, in the long haul, it might work as the WWF would eventually run out of places to acquire experienced wrestler who use steroids. The biggest problem with this solution is that it is over the long haul and many of the smaller promotions do not have enough capital to make such a sacrifice for a questionable long-term gain.

3) Consumer Boycotting - Wrestling fans decide not to support the federations who push steroid users. This is a highly unlikely solution. Few know about steroid use among wrestlers. Probably even fewer care. In a society that loves larger than life figures, it is not probable that this will ever happen. It would be effective if the millions of wrestling fans got together and refused to support these federations. But it simply will not happen.

4) Marketing - A smaller promotion begins a superior marketing campaign and draws more fans than McMahon. It has not happened in the past five years. Given the state of the business today and the smaller promotions relative ignorance of marketing concepts it does not seem likely in the near future, but it is the best solution. Should a smaller promotion invoke a superior marketing plan using wrestlers who do not take the drug, it would solve the problem as McMahon would have to compete on their level, rather than the smaller promotions competing on McMahon's level. This would most likely lead to an industry wide change.

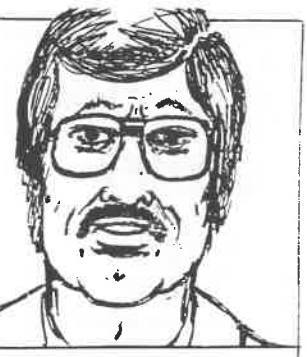
Thus, there is a major dilemma. The first three solutions, all seem improbable. The fourth is certainly possible, but it just is not happening anywhere today. A fifth solution would be for the wrestlers themselves to form a union and refuse to take steroids, but considering the NFL Players Union opinion of drug testing and their inability to police themselves, this seems even more ineffective. There will always be a wrestler willing to inject the drug for each wrestler that refuses.

So what can be done? Very little. We can boycott, but it will not change anything as the numbers simply are not large enough. In the meantime, we wait for Vince McMahon to change his theory of promoting. More specifically, who to promote. Perhaps fans' tastes will change and they will begin to prefer substance and wrestling ability over marketing and large physique. It could happen, but it will be a long time before we see a change in the fans' preferences or McMahon change his ways. Until that time, the steroid-related complications will continue to rise and society will have to ask itself why did we let this happen? Then again, society has yet to ask that question about cigarettes. ***

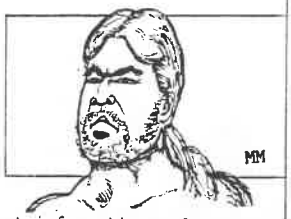
OH, NO! THE HORSEMEN HAVE STARTED WORKING ON THAT ONE BODY PART AS THEY ALWAYS DO!
UNFORTUNATELY FOR ROCKY KING, THIS TIME THE BODY PART IS HIS SPLEEN!
POSHOTS
GOOD GOD, IT'S REALLY GETTING PHYSICAL OUT THERE... THE VERTICAL BASE IS BREAKING DOWN!
THESE MEN ARE ALL COLLEGE GRADUATES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, EVEN IF SEVERAL OF THEM WERE SHOWN UP BY THE GLOW GIRLS ON "FAMILY FEUD"!
BR

DEAR MICK

SNR VIEWER MAIL



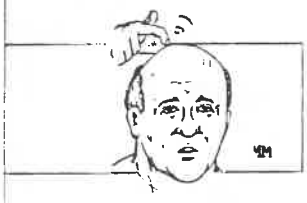
Time for another trip back to the Twilight Zone. Below are some actual letters that I have received at KTMA TV23 in Minneapolis. These people are really out there. Some have made it to the airwaves of "Saturday Night at Ringside." Others have made it to the circular file. But all have deserved to make it to these pages. Hold your nose, take a deep breath, and forge ahead as we dip into the "SNR Mailbag."



"If I could promote a card, I'd have Bob Lurtsema, Brad Rheingans, The Trooper, and Sgt. Slaughter wrestle The Four Horsemen in an American Title match."

"Thanks for presenting the most informative and complete wrestling show of all time. One thing's for sure. You cover both ends of the spectrum, from the ridiculous to the sublime. Your anniversary show was heaven on earth, with Mad Dog Vachon, Larry Hennig, Stan Kowalski, and the rest. Then a couple of weeks later you have to suffer through the "Blues Man" and Randy Gusto. I don't know how you do it. You never know what to expect from SNR. which is why I keep tuning in."

You must be doing pretty well. How much does Sharkey pay you to promote the PWA so much? Must be nice to have TV time on a station every week and not have to pay the station for the time. Didn't they call that "payola" in the old days?"



"Now that the AWA is just about out of business, I've got an idea for Verne. He can go into his basement and blow the dust off the cases of his vitamins that he tried to push in the sixties. He can go head to head with Hulkamania Protein Powder."

"Where the hell did the AWA dig up this "Ringside Ralph Strangis" guy? He screams into that microphone like he doesn't know the thing is turned on. The guy looks like a turtle, and he mouths everything that Greg Gagne says. It's like they do a responsive reading. I thought Trongard was bad, but this guy makes him look like Jim Ross."

"My sister and me think Jeff Jarrett and Eric Embry are the two sexiest guys on TV. Can you maybe run a contest where the winner gets a date with them?"

"When are you guys gonna unload that sorry excuse of a USWA and bring back POWW? The wrestling stunk, but who cared? I used to wait for my wife to go to sleep and then sneak into the den to watch Nina."

"A few months ago, all we heard from the NWA is "we wrestle." No cartoon character like the WWF. How can you defend them when they come up with Norman and his good sailor buddy Rotundo, and Cactus Jack. They're no better (or worse) than the WWF, and yet everybody takes shots at Vince. Why don't you just admit it?"

"Can the AWA get Boogie Woogie Man Valiant up here? He almost beat Jerry "Queen" Lawler on TV, so he should be able to take care of Zabisco."

"I can remember when your show didn't have no commercials. Now all we get is commercials. 75% commercials and the rest of the time is you talking and hardly no wrestling. Me and my wife would much rather seen the USWA all the way through and skip all the commercials and your blabbering." ***

POTSHOT • WADE HALL

OLDIE ANDERSON
WRESTLING'S OWN
GRUMPY ((OLD)) MAN
TACKLES THE QUESTION OF "The BIG SURPRISE!" →

HE'S OLD, MEAN-SPIRITED AND REACTIONARY... HE'S --

OLDIE ANDERSON □
WRESTLING'S GRUMPY OLD MAN!

PUNKS!

AND I'M HERE TO TALK ABOUT THE OLD DAYS!

STILL WEARING THE SAME T-SHIRT!!

SO LISTEN UP!

IN THE OLD DAYS, WE DIDN'T HAVE PRETTY-BOY HEROS, WITH THEIR FANCY BALLET MOVES AND THEIR "FRANKENSTEINERS" AND JAP FINISHERS...

WE DIDN'T HAVE NO WIMMEN VALETS! DAMN!

PISS ON YOU!

WE DID JOBS FOR ONE ANOTHER AND WE DIDN'T NEED ANY "ENTERTAINMENT" CRAP!

FUNNY. REEEAAAL FUNNY...

WHEN THEY SAY YOU'RE A WIT, POTSHOT, THEY'RE HALF RIGHT!

WE HAD RAZOR BLADES AND PARASITIC DISEASES! AND WE LIKED IT!

SURE I'M NUTS, BUT I'M THE BOSS!

PUNKS!

♫ GET A JOBBER (SHA-NA-NA-NA, SHA-NA-NA NA-NA) ♫

IN MY DAY, A SURPRISE WAS A REAL SURPRISE!

WHEN WE BROUGHT IN JYD PEOPLE WERE SURPRISED!

IT DIDN'T MATTER IF THEY'D SEEN HIM A WEEK EARLIER!

WE WERE GLAD TO SEE HIM, EVEN IF HE WAS OVERWEIGHT AND OUT OF SHAPE! WE WERE GLAD AND WE WERE SURPRISED AND WE LIKED IT!

SURE, THEY WERE BORING STORIES BUT THEY WERE STORIES AND WE LIKED 'EM!!

APOLOGIES TO DANA CARVEY!

PISS ON YOU!

WE DIDN'T NEED SOME JAP HI-SPOT EVERY 30 SECONDS! WE TOLD STORIES IN THE OLD DAYS!

WE HAD STORIES AND SURPRISES AND SUSPENDERS AND WE LIKED 'EM!

HEEE!

ESPECIALLY THE SUSPENDERS...

YEAH, YEAH, YEAH, SO I'M NUTS...

WHAT DOES THAT MAKE TED TURNER?

THE END

GOOD QUESTION, OLDIE!

AFTER TAKING SEVERAL HARD SLAPS FROM THE HAND OF REALITY, THE DREAM FINALLY FACES THE TRUTH...

WELL, IT LOOKS LAIK IT'S THE TWILIGHT OF THE DREAM... AH CAN'T DRAW BUT 300 PEOPLE TO A HOMECOMING DESPITE MY WILLINGNESS TO BLEED QUANTITIES SUFFICIENT TO DRAW ERIC EMBRY...

PLEASE, CUTHH' VINCE, LET ME FINISH MY DAYS DOING DEBASING JOBS FOR YOUR WELL-TANNED YOUNG MUSCLEMEN...

HUMOR

DAVE BROWN MICK KARCH LANCE RUSSELL

LEE MARSHALL CRAIG JOHNSON JIM ROSS

KEN RESNICK CHRIS CRUISE GORDON SOLIE

TORCH TALK COLLECTION:
The Announcers

On the following thirty pages are interviews with nine of the top announcers in pro wrestling today. Announcers are honored at the end of each year with nifty fan balloting which determines "Announcer of the Year." However, announcing can be a thankless job. For the most part, they are describing the stars and are destined to always "describe" rather than be the focus of the show.

However, in the past, many announcers have often become bigger than some of the wrestlers. Mene Gene Okerlund is a prime example. Some of the announcer interviewed are stars, others are simply "the guy that is talking during the wrestling match." Whichever role the nine announcers interviewed for this feature play, I sensed they all loved their jobs, and more importantly, the sport of pro wrestling.

This section of ANNUAL begins with Torch Weekly columnist Bill Kunkel who puts nine announcers through his newly developed "Analysis Rating System" for announcers.

The first "Torch Talk" is with Ken Resnick, a Minneapolis dweller who has one of the most interesting pasts as far as announcers go. He replaced Gene Okerlund when Mean Gene left the AWA in favor of the WWF. He quit the AWA and moved to the WWF. In the interview he discusses meetings he had with Vince McMahon Jr. and an amusing phobia Vince Junior has. Ken has since faded from the WWF is working with the Ladies Pro Wrestling Association.

In the second "Torch Talk," I am proud to feature an interview with Gordon Solie, who became a legend on Ted Turner's Superstation in the eighties. He discusses how he got into wrestling, the McMahon buy-out of Georgia Championship Wrestling, and his current job with the NWA.

The third "Torch Talk" is with the man most consider the best announcer in pro wrestling today, Jim Ross. Ross has been the top announcer voted by the Torch Readers four out of four polls. His current position is with the NWA where he anchors the TBS line-up. To Ross, wrestling is not just a job. He is a wrestling enthusiast. He gives his opinions on the varying journalistic approaches to wrestling and several other timely issues.

The fourth "Torch Talk" is with Mick Karch, who happens to be a Torch Weekly columnist. He is currently anchor announcer for Rob Russen's Sarasota, FL based IWA and for the Minneapolis-based PWA. Mick hosts a pro wrestling block in his homebase of the Twin Cities, "Saturday Night At Ringside," for over two years. Mick discusses what it is like to produce a wrestling block along with recounts of his checkered past with the Gagne's, which included shouting at them as fan and receiving paychecks from them as an announcer.

A "Torch Talk" with Dave Brown comes next. Dave, who is a weatherman by trade in Memphis, was color commentator next to Lance Russell for over twenty years. Dave talks about working with Lance, the crazy incidents that have occurred on the live show over the years, and his thoughts on some of the names that went on to be famous, but were not when he interviewed them, and the difference now that he is the host of the live WMC show.

Lee Marshall follows with the sixth "Torch Talk." Lee Marshall, who is known for being straightforward with his thoughts on wrestling on the air, does not disappoint in this interview. Lee talks of how he got into wrestling, the problem of steroids in wrestling, and his days with the AWA.

The seventh "Torch Talk" introduces you to the new USWA announcer in Dallas, Craig Johnson. Craig replaced Marc Lowrance who went into the ministry full-time. Craig reveals how he got his current announcing position, his thoughts on his first few weeks announcing, and his thoughts on the USWA as a promotion and TV product.

The eighth "Torch Talk" is a frank discussion with Chris Cruise who talks about his departure from the NWA, working with Terry Funk, Ole Anderson as a booker, and some of the heat he took from NWA personnel during his stay. Chris does not hold back during this interview.

The ninth and final "Torch Talk" is appropriately enough with the man who has been announcing longer than any major announcer today, Lance Russell. In the interview, Lance pours his memories and opinions onto the pages.

I feel fortunate to have been able to speak with each of these announcers. I feel even more fortunate that I am able to share with you the intriguing, humorous, fascinating, and enlightening comments made by these nine men in their interviews. Now it is okay to turn the page and absorb the inaugural "Torch Talk Collection" on the announcers of pro wrestling. ***

A.R.S.

The Announcers

The following is a special feature by Bill Kunkel. In the past he has developed a way of rating wrestlers in a more objective manner than traditionally used. The system is called "Analysis Rating System" where he rates wrestlers in seven categories ranging from wrestling skill to interviews. To fit in with the theme of the "Torch Talk Collection: The Announcers," Bill has developed an "Analysis Rating System" for announcers in five categories. Bill Kunkel rates nine announcers... -W.K.

The five categories we considered were:

* FUNDAMENTALS: English Usage, grammar, and voice quality
* SET-UP: Ability to explain angles and get wrestlers over.
* EXCITEMENT: Does he get your blood going?
* THINK FAST!: Can he think on his feet? Is he spontaneous or does an unexpected situation fluster him?
* WRESTLING IQ: Does he understand the history and traditions of pro wrestling?

Ten points in each category, maximum score 50 pts. The system will be reevaluated after reading the interviews with the announcers and finding which qualities they feel are most important to be a good wrestling announcer. As always, I welcome any suggestions concerning the system.

JIM ROSS: NWA

FUNDAMENTALS (7): His voice is excellent, a perfect instrument for wrestling broadcasting, but his grammar can be very weak. Constant use of cliches ("A physical match!" "Vertical base" "He likes to pick out a body part!" etc) and poor English hurts overall rating.

SET-UP (6): Highly overrated in this area. Repeating three times in a match that some heel was first team intramural ping pong does not constitute "background." Frequently seems clearly disinterested in angles he has been assigned to push.

EXCITEMENT (9): Once a 10, his ability to generate true excitement has been dampened by years of hardcore shilling and phoney hyperbole. Still, when he gets going, there's no one better.

THINK FAST (9): Hard to knock him off the track, no matter what goes wrong - a valuable asset in the NWA.

WRESTLING IQ (9): Knows his wrestling. Unfortunately, his memory has become more selective with his years in the NWA.

TOTAL: 40 points.

VINCE MCMAHON: WWF

FUNDAMENTALS (8): Strong in this regard. Occasional lapses in usage, but his voice is very strong. I am mixed on whether we should get the maxxed-out Wrestlemania voice so often, but you cannot knock its effectiveness.

SET-UP (9): Best in the business.

EXCITEMENT (8): Can really stand the hairs up on the back of your neck when he gets going.

THINK FAST (7): Not much chance to show his stuff in this regard in the slickly executed world of the WWF.

WRESTLING IQ (5): He knows it, but if you are looking for historical perspective from Vince, you're better off looking for Oldie Anderson at a Tone Loc concert.

TOTAL: 37 pts.

LANCE RUSSELL: NWA

FUNDAMENTALS (8): Lance is somewhat of an acquired taste in terms of his voice quality, but otherwise his fundamentals are sound.

SET-UP (7): Only average. Often neglects to fill in gaps in information. Also, his ability to get wrestlers over has suffered since his tenure with the NWA.

EXCITEMENT (6): This has been Lance's biggest fall-off area since leaving the CWA, where his well-modulated, extremely laid back style made his occasional lapses into excitement seem like electrified histrionics. In the NWA, he never gets out of the box in terms of excitement.

THINK FAST (9): I cannot recall ever seeing Lance appear flustered. He does not have a Jim Cornette level mind, but he cannot be undone.

WRESTLING IQ (7): He may know it, but he certainly does not share it with viewers.

TOTAL: 37 pts.

MARC LOWRANCE: Formerly USWA Texas

FUNDAMENTALS (8): Very strong in most fundamental areas, with occasional grammatical lapses.

SET-UP (7): Again, very solid in getting wrestling over and setting up angles. Excellent straight man.

EXCITEMENT (7): Occasionally overdid it (i.e. "HE MAY BE DEAD!") but mostly did a good job in this area.

THINK FAST (6): Poor when flustered, which happened occasionally.

WRESTLING IQ (4): No sense that Marc really understood what was going on. Between that and the fact that he spent most of his WCCW tenure lying for Fritz, he takes a beating in this category.

TOTAL: 32 pts.

GORILLA MONSOON: WWF

FUNDAMENTALS (6): He has gotten quite a bit better in the past few years; fewer Monsoonisms ("That big bo-hemoth!") and grammatic jaw-droppers. This will never be his strong category, however. Good play-by-play.

SET-UP (6): Frequently overdoses it on hyping faces, especially when playing off Heenan. Was better in this regard when working with Jesse.

EXCITEMENT (7): Never gets into the stratosphere; lets the action speak for itself.

THINK FAST (5): Thank the banana gods that you don't often have to, Gino.

WRESTLING IQ (6): At least occasionally references something that happened in the past (former IC Champs are his specialty) but it is a losing battle in the retro WWF.

TOTAL: 30 pts.

CHRIS CRUISE: Formerly NWA

FUNDAMENTALS (8): Good and getting better. Solid, pro-sports style voice and excellent grammar.

SET-UP (7): When allowed to, in the chaotic NWA, he could set up an angle beautifully. Not as strong at getting wrestlers over, however.

EXCITEMENT (6): Needs to work harder at generating electricity.

THINK FAST (8): In his short stint, I never saw him get flustered, which is damned impressive for a neophyte.

WRESTLING IQ (7): A newcomer, but made an impressive effort to shore up his historical knowledge.

TOTAL: 36 pts.

TONY SCHIAVONE: NWA

FUNDAMENTALS (7): Voice is a little annoying, but his English usage is excellent.

SET-UP (9): One of the best in the business at getting angles and wrestlers over.

EXCITEMENT (8): Solid.

THINK FAST (7): Always able to make on-the-spot adjustments. His WWF work was more studied, but a return to the NWA should get him back on track.

WRESTLING IQ (7): Does not share enough background information with viewers.

TOTAL: 38 pts.

DAVE BROWN: USWA Memphis

FUNDAMENTALS (7): Excellent grammar and solid, if low-key, style.

SET-UP (7): Good, Memphis-style work.

EXCITEMENT (5): You can only take being low-key so far.

THINK FAST (7): Thinks well on his feet. Memphis provides many opportunities to think fast.

WRESTLING IQ (7): Needs to share more background with viewers.

TOTAL: 33 pts.

BOB DOV: ICW

FUNDAMENTALS (5): His English is occasionally awful and generally bad; his voice quality is okay.

SET-UP (6): Is beginning to understand how you set up angles and wrestlers, but only beginning.

EXCITEMENT (7): Goes over the top too quickly, but this is one of his stronger areas.

THINK FAST (4): Not if his life depended on it.

WRESTLING IQ (1): I will not say he does not know anything; he generally remembers what happened the previous week, for example. Cannot ever remember wrestlers and names and, worse, does not seem to care.

TOTAL 23 pts. ***

KEN RESNICK

When I went out to interview with Vince, it was like anything else, I talked to two or three people ahead of time and they evidently gave their blessing because the next person I talked to was a little bit more important. I finally got in to interview with Vince and one of the first questions he asked me was about my mustache.

Ken Resnick has been an announcer with the AWA and WWF and is currently working for the LPWA, the Ladies Professional Wrestling Association. He is known to AWA viewers as the man who replaced Mean Gene when Gene left the AWA for the WWF. The following is a "Torch Talk" with "Killer" Ken, nickname courtesy of Hulk Hogan, conducted by Wade Keller in May, 1990...

WADE KELLER: HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN ANNOUNCING PRO WRESTLING?

KEN RESNICK: Actually, it was Verne Gagne who got me started. I had met Verne at a lot of celebrity events; I used to be with the old Fighting Saints of the World Hockey Association and was the field manager for the Minnesota Kicks soccer team; I was very involved in the Viking Celebrity Golf and Tennis Tournament and others like it and got to know him through those. At the time I was doing sports for an NBC affiliate station and it was Verne who got me involved in (wrestling).

VERNE GAGNE at a celebrity sports event (WK)

KELLER: WERE YOU A FAN OF PRO WRESTLING GROWING UP OR WAS WRESTLING JUST A JOB?

RESNICK: I was a fan growing up. I used to love (wrestling); matter of fact, one of my boyhood idols was The Crusher.

KELLER: ARE YOU STILL A FAN TODAY?

RESNICK: Oh yes, definitely. I think it would be impossible to work as many matches and do the things I do if I didn't really enjoy it.

KELLER: NOWYOU'RECURRENTLY ANNOUNCING FOR THE LPWA. CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT THE LPWA IS?

RESNICK: The concept behind it is there's been some abortive attempts in the past at women's professional wrestling; there was GLOW and POWW, but it never presented women's wrestling in a true athletic atmosphere. The women in the past would fill in a men's card much along the same lines as the midgets would. I think in the 1990's you're going to see a rise in all of women's professional sports, at the intercollegate level, the high school level, and certainly the professional level. The founders to be of the LPWA decided the timing was right for a Women's Professional Wrestling Association where it's wrestling, not a skin show and not a lot of skits and melodrama. It's women's professional wrestling. The reviews so far have been very good.

KELLER: WHERE IS THE LPWA RUNNING SHOWS?

RESNICK: Right now, they're doing it, I think right. They decided that you need at least six to nine months of television exposure before you start running house shows. So they, other than the television tapings, have not run any house shows to this point. They plan to do extensive tours in both the United States and overseas in the fall. I think that's good, because to run when you're still new and not draw very good houses depresses everyone.

KELLER: ARE YOU INVOLVED BEYOND THE ANNOUNCING?

RESNICK: I am. I'm involved in some of the booking, a lot of the television production - really in all aspects.

KELLER: WHEN DID YOU BEGIN WORKING FOR THE AWA?

RESNICK: About 1983.

KELLER: DID YOU LIKE WORKING FOR THE GAGNES?

RESNICK: Ahhhhhmmm, it had its moments, let's say that (laughs).

KELLER: OKAY, WHAT WAS GOOD ABOUT WORKING FOR THE GAGNES?

RESNICK: When I first started, the AWA was really the premiere wrestling association. Look at the talent when I first started. They had the Crusher, Mad Dog Vachon, Hulk Hogan, Bobby "The Brain" Heenan, Jesse Ventura, Blackjack Lanza, Ray "The Crippler" Stevens, Nick Bockwinkel, Sgt. Slaughter - I know I'm going to be forgetting some. It was the best talent around. It was great for me. When I first started it was people like Wally Karbo, one of the great minds in professional wrestling, and the rest kind of took me under their wing, and the things I learned from them - I couldn't be doing if it wasn't for those people. I certainly wouldn't have improved to become the announcer I think I've become. A couple years ago Pro Wrestling Illustrated did a top ten announcers in the history of professional wrestling and they had me, like, eighth. I couldn't have gotten where I got without the help of those people. A lot of those people have become very dear friends that, when I was out of wrestling for a bit, stayed in contact with and did things with socially. Those memories are great.

KELLER: I STILL REMEMBER THE INTERVIEW YOU DID ANNOUNCING THE SURPRISE ARRIVAL OF SGT. SLAUGHTER, "THE BIG STAR OUT OF NEW YORK." IT WAS BIG A SHOCK TO ME.

RESNICK: Oh, it was. I can remember that interview to this day. We did it up in the office because it was a last minute deal. It's funny, there again, from the first day we met, just something clicked and Sarge is one of the best friends I have. Whenever he comes to town, he always stays with me or I stay with him out there close to his family. We shop together. I mean he's one of the best friends I've got. That was the best point, some of the friendships I made in the AWA, a lot of them are lasting to this day.

KELLER: ON THE OTHER HAND, WHAT WAS BAD ABOUT WORKING FOR THE GAGNES?

RESNICK: The Gagne's. I don't want it to sound like sour grapes or throwing stones. It's evident when you're the best around and you suddenly slip to almost a minor-type promotion. I didn't subscribe to the way they treated people. Not just myself, but a lot of wrestlers, office people, and the like, they didn't treat them very nice. There was a lot of false promises, yelling and screaming. It was almost that yelling and screaming and belittling people was the norm, not the exception.

KELLER: DURING YOUR AWA DAYS WHO DID YOU ENJOY INTERVIEWING THE MOST?

RESNICK: I would say The Crusher. The man was a classic. It wasn't fun in the sense of laughing, but someone who I really enjoyed interviewing was Bobby Heenan. He was never at a loss for words. Bobby Heenan and Nick Bockwinkel, both. In anything I was doing, whether it was a wrestling interview or back when I was with NBC, when you go to interview someone, the worst thing is if you get someone who gives you all yes or no answers. To me, the best interview technique is to only have three or four questions, and then listen to what the person is saying and then you can just go from there. So people like Bobby and Nick or The Crusher, all I needed to know was who they were wrestling and where and the rest just flowed.

KELLER: WHO DID YOU DREAD INTERVIEWING?

RESNICK: Boy, I tell ya', now that's a hard one. The good ones stand out and the rest... Anybody who was there could do a decent interview, because they wouldn't have gotten there because in those days the AWA was the pinnacle of wrestling. The office phones were seized with people wanting to come in, so most of the people were good. I guess the most pressure was when you were having to interview Verne or Greg Gagne.

KELLER: WHAT IS THE CRAZIEST MEMORY YOU HAVE FROM THE AWA BEING AROUND THE WRESTLERS?

RESNICK: I'd say it was in Winnipeg, Canada. Mad Dog Vachon totally lost it and nailed me with a chair. Afterwards he was very apologetic. And the time the Sheik broke my nose on television with his sword. Both were maybe not crazy, maybe more painful is what sticks out in my mind.

KELLER: UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES DID YOU LEAVE THE AWA?

RESNICK: I can't give you the exact date, but it was after WrestleRock at the Dome (in Minneapolis, April, 1986). I just said, because of the way they were treating

myself and other people, enough was enough. I'm not one to throw stones. It was just a lot of things. I'm just one, who, if you're not enjoying what you're doing, you probably shouldn't be doing it in the first place. And as much as I liked a lot of the people, the means just wouldn't justify the end, in this instance. That was my last day. As a matter of fact, I never did go back to the office after.

I had fully intended... I used to be a corporate sales manager for Chrysler Corporation. That Monday I called my old boss at Chrysler and started my wheels rolling to possibly return to Chrysler. Blackjack Lanza called me that Monday night - Blackjack is also one of my very best friends, even to this day - wanting to know how WrestleRock had gone. He had already left the AWA due to similar circumstances and had since joined the WWF. I told him what happened, it was a pretty good crowd, you know, went over some of the matches, and I told him I quit, I was done. And he said, "Ah, you'll go back." And I said, no I had already called Chrysler. I said, "I just can't take it anymore, Jack." And he said, "I know where you're coming from." Because Jack had worked in the office with me. He called me the next day and said, "You haven't agreed to anything with Chrysler yet, have you?" I said, "No." And he said, "Don't." And then he called the next day and said, "Vince McMahon wants you to come out and see him." So, despite the story that the AWA put out that I was lured away by the bright lights and the big bucks, that's not the case; it came after the fact.

KELLER: THAT'S NEWS TO ME. HOW WAS THE ADJUSTMENT FROM THE AWA TO THE WWF?

RESNICK: It would be like if you were playing minor league baseball, say you were playing Class AA ball, and the next day you're a center fielder for the New York Yankees. I would probably describe it that way.

KELLER: IN WHAT WAY WAS IT MORE PROFESSIONAL OR MORE MAJOR LEAGUE?

RESNICK: They were so unbelievably organized, number one. The way they treated people was the difference of night and day. They were cordial. They were polite. They treated everyone just great. The difference was mind boggling.

KELLER: WAS THE DIFFERENCE IN PAY ALSO MIND-BOGGLING?

RESNICK: No question. No question about that. To give you an idea, my first day starting was double. It was great. I'll tell ya' a funny story.

KELLER: ALL RIGHT, LET'S HEAR IT.

RESNICK: When I went out to interview with Vince, it was like anything else, I talked to two or three people ahead of time and they evidently gave their blessing because the next person I talked to was a little bit more important. I finally got in to interview with Vince and one of the first questions he asked me was about my mustache. And, I kind of asked him why. He came right out and said he hates mustaches.

I spent about two hours with him. About an hour into the conversation he asked if I would shave my mustache. And I said, well, if that was the only stumbling block to putting a deal together, I would shave it (laughs). Wait, you haven't heard the punchline yet. He didn't say another word. We talked for another hour. He asked how much I was getting and I told him. And then he threw out a figure and asked if that was acceptable, and like I said, it was double what I was getting. And I said, "That would certainly work." And he said, "Well, if everything else is okay, when would you be available." I said, "I can start right now if you want." He looked at me for about ten, fifteen seconds, didn't say a word, reached into his bottom desk drawer, pulled out a razor and a can of shaving cream and said, "The bathroom is right through that door." I literally shaved it right while I was in Vince's office.

KELLER: YOU SPENT TWO HOURS WITH VINCE MCMAHON. WHAT WAS YOUR IMPRESSION OF HIM AFTER SURELY HEARING A LOT ABOUT HIM BEFOREHAND?

RESNICK: I was very impressed. He was very businesslike. We talked about philosophies, what I did, what I liked, and what I didn't like. There's not a lot of small talk about Vince. He's very matter-of-fact and businesslike. He was always great to me.

KELLER: DID ANYTHING ABOUT HIM SURPRISE YOU?

RESNICK: The only thing that really surprised me was how tall he is. He is very tall. I mean, I'm about 6'1" and a half, and Vince has got to be about 6'5".

He was a lot like he comes off (on TV). But he was always very, very nice to me. Matter of fact, another thing that comes to mind, they kept you moving quite a bit. One day I had a day off, or two days off. I was, matter of fact, scheduled to visit some friends in Milwaukee. The office called and said that the next day I had to be down in Charlotte, North Carolina to do some interviews with Andre the Giant who had just come back. Vince was there. We did the interviews and I flew home that night. And the next day I got a call and it was the office again and she said, "Could you please hold for Vince?" You know, which was a little unusual. He just got on the phone and said, "Ken, I just wanted to give you a call and tell you how much I appreciate it. I'm sorry if we had to screw up your day off, but I really appreciate the fact that you were willing to come down. I won't forget it. I just wanted to take a minute and call and tell you how much I appreciate it. It was funny, about three weeks later he called again, and said he just wanted to let me know my next paycheck was, in effect, a pretty hefty raise. He was great to me.

KELLER: WHEN YOU WERE WITH THE WWF, DID YOUR DUTIES EXTEND BEYOND INTERVIEWS?

RESNICK: I did a guest shot on TNT. I ended up doing a lot of color working with Gorilla Monsoon on a lot of Prime Time matches. Besides the interviewing I did some play-by-play, too. Some markets I did ring announcing if I happened to be there.

KELLER: BESIDES THE LPWA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

RESNICK: I had a car dealership. I just sold that because the car market was so distressed. So right now I'm just kind of looking.

KELLER: WOULD LIKE TO CONTINUE WITH THE LPWA OR WORK FOR ONE OF THE MEN'S PROMOTIONS?

RESNICK: Ahhh, yes (laughs). I mean, the LPWA is great, and obviously I'm exclusive to them as far as women's wrestling. But they have no problem if I want to go to a men's league.

KELLER: I RECALL WHEN TONY SCHIAVONE LEFT THE NWA EARLY IN 1989, THEY WERE LOOKING FOR A REPLACEMENT AND YOUR NAME WAS MENTIONED. DID YOU HAVE A TRYOUT WITH THEM?

RESNICK: It went fine, but it was a point where I still had the car dealership and was actively managing that. They were looking for someone full-time and at that point, I couldn't commit to it.

KELLER: WHAT WAS YOUR IMPRESSION OF THE NWA?

RESNICK: I would say they were not quite as organized as the WWF, but much more than the AWA. But that's not really a fair question for me to answer, because I was just there for a day. They could be every bit as professional as the WWF.

KELLER: WOULD YOU LIKE TO WORK FOR THE NWA OR WWF?

RESNICK: The NWA or WWF, yeah, I'd love to.

KELLER: HOW DID YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WWF END?

RESNICK: It was a point when Gene (Okerlund) wanted to return and do the interviews again, plus now the format, now they don't do the interviews for every market. As a matter of fact, the wrestlers do them without the announcer. And they built their own studio facilities in Stamford, Connecticut. I wasn't in a position at that point to move out there. I mean it was amicable. I still do ring announcing for them now.

MENE GENE OKERLUND (WK)

KELLER: YOU MENTIONED THE STUDIO IN STAMFORD. WHERE DID YOU DO INTERVIEWS BEFORE?

RESNICK: All over the country. Where ever the matches were, they used to fly crews and things all over. In about one year, I think I worked in thirty-eight states.

KELLER: DID YOU HAVE TO FILE THIRTY-EIGHT TAX RETURNS?

RESNICK: No. Thankfully I was a salaried employee. I would get the same whether I worked five days one week or two days one week. Yeah, that (would have been) a nightmare.

KELLER: WHAT WAS YOUR MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT INVOLVING WRESTLING?

RESNICK: I remember the first interview I ever did for the AWA, you know wrestling is so totally different from doing sports at a newsdesk. I mean I was terrible. I mean I was really intimidated. I watch some of them today, and I say, "Oh my god. I was horrible."

I can tell ya' another one. My first day with the WWF. It was funny, because the first day I worked for them, it was May 1st, it was for a Saturday Night's Event in Providence, Rhode Island. So I went out to do these interviews, and suddenly, NBC people are there, McMahon is there, I mean everybody is there watching. And I was really nervous. I mean it was brand new, and it was different. I mean, the first couple interviews, I was not very good. I was nervous and uptight. I mean everybody had seen what I could do, but they could see I was nervous. And George Scott, who at that time was with the WWF as the booker, was standing there watching and said to Bobby Heenan, "Boy, he's not doing very well." Bobby said, "I think he's nervous." George said, "I can understand it." And Bobby said, "I think I know how to cure him."

I was right in the middle of an interview and all of a sudden Bobby came screaming on the set kind of pounding his forehead reminiscent of Verne: "Goddamnit, Jesus Christ, blah, blah, blah..." and he kept yelling and screaming. I cracked up, it was like the ol' AWA days, and after that I was fine. I just needed something, for Bobby to say, hey, it's not like that (the way it was in the AWA), just relax. I mean, that was funny. I owed Bobby a lot. That really brought me back to where I should be.

The funny thing was, like Hulk was there and the guys who had been with me in the AWA were crackin' up, but the other wrestlers who had never been there had no idea what was going on.

KELLER: WHO DO YOU FEEL ARE THE BEST OVERALL ANNOUNCERS IN WRESTLING TODAY?

RESNICK: Well, you gotta' go with Gene (Okerlund), who's certainly one of the best. Vince is great. Jesse the Body is super. Gorilla has got to be one of the best straight men that ever was. I mean, Bobby Heenan, everything he does is off-the-cuff. Bobby should have his own sit com, I mean he is that witty. He cracked me up one time on an interview. This was back in the AWA. We were doing this interview and all of a sudden he said, "Oh, hey, did you get my Christmas card yet?" I said, "Well, no." And he said, "And you won't, either." It just came to mind. I would say probably those guys. And Jim Ross is very good, he's excellent. Hey, I'm not bad either.

KELLER: THAT WAS MY NEXT QUESTION. HOW DO YOU RATE YOURSELF AMONG THE BEST ANNOUNCERS. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE YOUR STRONGER POINTS AND WEAKER POINTS?

RESNICK: I think my play-by-play is good. I've done football and hockey and basketball. I think my interviewing is good because you develop a repoire and you know when somebody needs you to break in or somebody's on a roll, to be quiet. And I think that was one of my strong points. I never tried to really upstage any of the talent. I never really had a big head or anything. One of my strongpoints was I always did my best to make whoever I was working with look good.

KELLER: HOW ABOUT A WEAKER POINT - SOMETHING YOU COULD WORK ON?

RESNICK: Well, not necessarily work on it, but my physical size. I'm about 6'1" and half and about 200 pounds and I make some wrestlers look smaller than they'd choose.

KELLER: WHY CAN'T YOU WORK ON THAT?

RESNICK: (laughs) I did a lot of times. Depending on who it was, I'd kind of stoop down. Sometimes when I'd go to the arena or meet fans, they were surprised I was as tall as I am.

KELLER: I REMEMBER WHEN YOU HAD TO SIT ON A STOOL BECAUSE YOUR LEG WAS IN A CAST?

RESNICK: Yeah, that's another memory. I had gotten hurt - I had ruptured a tendon and torn a muscle and had a blood clot in my leg. Talking about painful memories, though, and I hadn't thought of it until you brought it up. I was still on crutches at ringside at the (St. Paul) Civic Center when Stan Hansen was wrestling Sarge for the title. Hansen knew Sarge and I were really good friends, so about half way through the match, Sarge threw Hansen out and (Hansen) was so mad, he grabbed me on crutches and slammed me into the ringpost and bodyslammed me on top of Sarge. Because Sarge had been knocked down, he thought it was Hansen. He rolled over and was getting ready to throw a punch and he said, "What the hell are you doing here." And I said, "It wasn't my idea!" But Hansen got me again on my bad leg, grabbed my crutches, and whacked me there a couple of times. It set my healing back a couple weeks. I was not a big fan of that move.

KELLER: DO YOU ENJOY INTERVIEWING OR ANNOUNCING MORE AND WHICH DO YOU FIND MORE DIFFICULT?

RESNICK: I kind of enjoy the interviewing more because right before and right after you get a chance to know the wrestlers a lot better. Some of the ones who were a little weaker in conversation I planned to talk myself a little bit more of the interview. The ones who were stronger I just got in there and let them roll.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES FOR A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

RESNICK: To try to be unbiased, and that's hard. You develop friendships and relationships so trying to remain unbiased.

And to remember it is television, and it's not like doing radio, you don't have to fully paint the picture. The people can see what's going on, so just try to add as much as you can to the match. They can see what's going on. Sometimes something might be happening in the ring and your telling a story just to add as much as you can.

The third one would be really the ability to roll with the punches, both figuratively and literally.

KELLER: DO YOU HAVE ANY REGRETS CONCERNING YOUR CAREER?

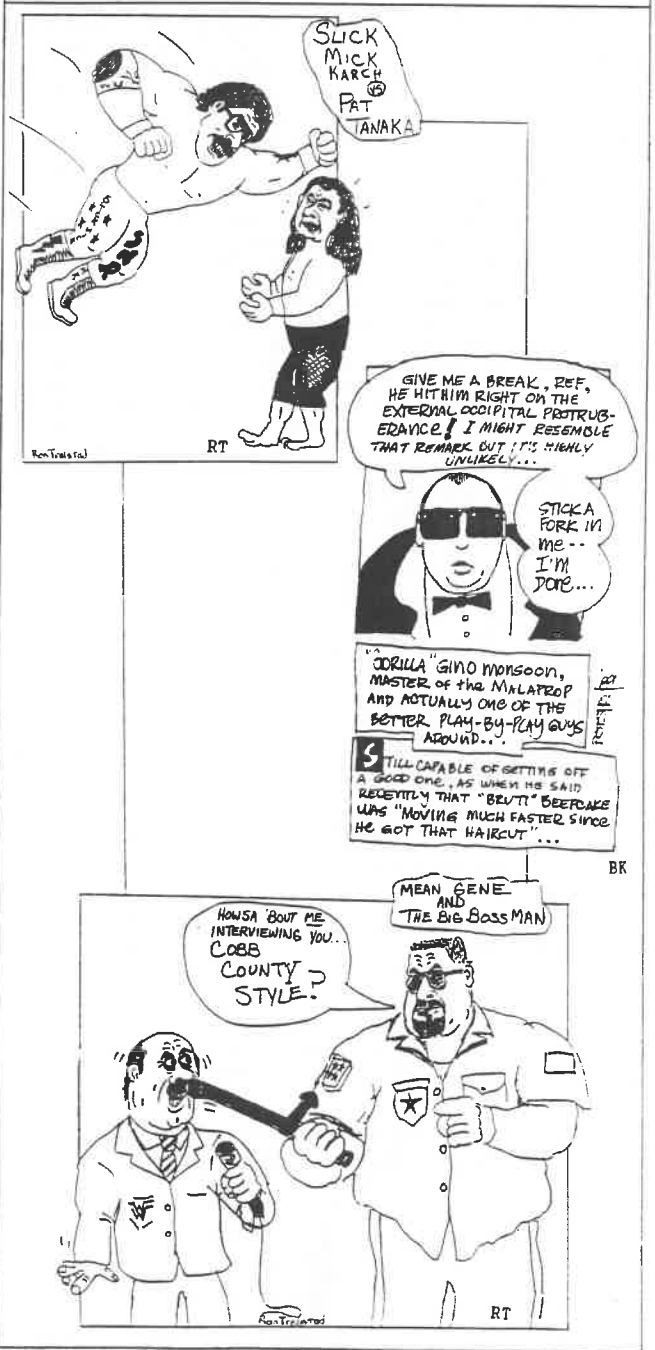
RESNICK: I wish it would have worked out that I could have stayed with the WWF.

KELLER: WHO ARE YOUR FAVORITE PERFORMERS IN PRO WRESTLING?

RESNICK: It's hard, because I know them. Still active today, I would say The Hulkster, Bobby Heenan - listening to him, he's great - and The Sarge, based both on talent and on friendship.

KELLER: THAT'S ALL THE QUESTIONS I'VE GOT FOR YOU. THANKS FOR YOUR TIME. THOSE WERE SOME INTERESTING STORIES.

RESNICK: Great. Thanks a lot. ***


SLICK MICK KARCH PAT TANAKA
RT
GIVE ME A BREAK, REF, HE HIT HIM RIGHT ON THE EXTERNAL OCCIPITAL PROTRUBERANCE! I MIGHT RESEMBLE THAT REMARK, BUT IT'S HIGHLY UNLIKELY...
STICK A FORK IN ME -- I'M DONE...
"GORILLA" GINO MONSOON, MASTER of the MALAPROP AND ACTUALLY ONE OF THE BETTER PLAY-BY-PLAY GUYS AROUND...
STILL CAPABLE OF GETTING OFF A GOOD ONE, AS WHEN HE SAID RECENTLY THAT "BRUTI" BEEFCAKE WAS "MOVING MUCH FASTER SINCE HE GOT THAT HAIRCUT"...
BK
MEAN GENE AND THE BIG BOSS MAN
HOWSA 'BOUT ME INTERVIEWING YOU.. COBB COUNTY STYLE?
RT

GORDON SOLIE

All I can say is I feel extremely fortunate to be able to do something for thirty years that I thoroughly enjoy. A lot of people have had a job for thirty years and hated every day of it. And, wow, what a shame they had to go through life disliking something that important.

Gordon Solie throughout the eighties was billed as "The Walter Cronkite of Professional Wrestling." Now, after announcing wrestling for territories such as Alabama, Florida, and Georgia which was seen nationally on Superstation TBS, he is in the NWA and getting the most widespread exposure of his career. He originally returned to the NWA as host of the "Wrestling News Network" on the Power Hour, but those duties expanded. Now he is the utility man of the NWA announcing crew. In the following "Torch Talk" conducted by Wade Keller the morning of the Bash at the Omni Hotel in Baltimore, Gordon discusses his career and his future while keeping one eye on the auto races on television...

WADE KELLER: HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

GORDON SOLIE: I first got involved when I was doing a radio sports show and I used to interview wrestlers who were in town to compete. That was in Tampa in 1950. From that it graduated to the point where Cowboy Luttrell called me one day and said his ring announcer had quit and could I take over as guest ring announcer. I said, "Possibly, what does it pay." And he said, "About five dollars a night." That was one night a week well, that was ten percent of what I was making. Back in 1950 and just getting started in radio, I was making fifty bucks a week.

KELLER: FROM THE RING ANNOUNCING, HOW DID YOU MOVE INTO THE PLAY-BY-PLAY AND HOST POSITIONS?

SOLIE: What happened there, of course, radio and ring announcing is one thing and then when television broke in on the scene, Cowboy Luttrell was the promoter and the only station in town was channel 38 owned by the city of St. Petersburg. And they were the first one on the air in the area. A fellow by the name of Guy Bagli, who is now deceased, was the sports director, a very personable individual. So when Cowboy decided he wanted to start televising wrestling, he understood the value of it, so Guy Bagli did the TV show for a period of time. Then he and Bagli got into an arguement about money and so Bagli got canned. Then Bob Jones took over and by then a couple of other stations had come on the market on VHF as opposed to UHF. Finally, sort of as a last resort, Cowboy said, "Do you think you can handle it?" And the rest, as they say, is history.

KELLER: FOR WHAT PROMOTIONS HAVE YOU WORKED?

SOLIE: Florida Championship Wrestling, and I stayed with them, my actual time in service with them was over thirty years. My actual time on the air was twenty-six or twenty-seven years. I worked for Continental for a couple of years. I went to work for Turner's TBS in the early seventies. I worked there for about eight years. I worked for USA with Ron Fuller for about a year, year and a half out of Tennessee. I worked for a short period of time in conjunction with Lance Russell with Jerry Jarrett's promotion in Memphis, that had to be back in the late-seventies. Now the nice thing is Lance and I do the 900 number for Ted Turner, which has been such a pleasure, since he is such a delightful guy, so nice to work with. Then to Florida for a while and then back to Turner and the NWA.

KELLER: WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR INVOLVEMENTS IN WRESTLING BESIDES ANNOUNCING?

SOLIE: I used to handle the publicity and promotion and all of that. Now, oddly enough, it's come full circle, because I am now the event coordinator for World Championship Wrestling in Florida. The next three promotions in Florida are mine. It's fascinating, a completely different facet of the business. I'm already familiar with the job.

KELLER: WERE YOU A BIG WRESTLING FAN GROWING UP?

SOLIE: My dad was an amateur wrestler, so he was a big wrestling fan, and I guess I inherited some of that from him.

KELLER: WHO WERE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITES?

SOLIE: Obviously (Bronco) Nagurski because he was from Minnesota and that's where I'm from. He made a pretty big mark in my early days. Buddy Rogers was another.

KELLER: WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FONDEST MEMORIES GROWING UP AS A FAN?

SOLIE: I've always been involved in action sports, wrestling, boxing, auto racing. I was part owner of several speed ways in Florida and did the "wheel by wheel action," if you will. I also travelled for three years with an automobile daredevil thrill show.

KELLER: WHEN YOU WERE IN AUTO RACING, WAS RACING OR WRESTLING YOUR GOAL?

SOLIE: Well, I was doing both auto racing and wrestling at the time and wrestling became bigger and bigger in my life and that's finally what I decided to stick with.

KELLER: HAVE YOU EVER REGRETTED CHOOSING WRESTLING ANNOUNCING AS YOUR CAREER?

SOLIE: No, I've been very fortunate that I'm still doing something I love to do and I've been doing it over thirty years and still enjoy it.

KELLER: DO YOU ENJOY WRESTLING AS MUCH TODAY AS YOU DID TEN OR TWENTY YEARS AGO?

SOLIE: Yes, it's all still there. I thoroughly enjoy it and have a good time with it. I enjoy working with a whole announce crew now.

KELLER: WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT GOALS NOW AS AN ANNOUNCER? DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF MORE OF A UTILITY MAN THAN AN ANCHOR?

SOLIE: I think so, yeah. As an example, unfortunately, Tony Schiavone lost his mother this weekend, so I will be doing the interviews Tony Shiavone would have been doing tonight. With the amount of broad ranging experience, I can pretty much go anywhere I'm needed.

KELLER: YOU WERE WITH GEORGIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING WHEN IT WAS BOUGHT OUT BY VINCE MCMAHON. WHAT WERE YOUR EMOTIONS WHEN IT WAS BOUGHT-OUT?

SOLIE: Well, it was very disappointing. It created at the time some major shifts in my livelihood, basically. It was sort of cyclical, and what goes around comes around. It's come back full-circle.

KELLER: WHAT WAS THE ATTITUDE OF THE PROMOTERS, WRESTLERS, AND ALL PERSONNEL WHEN THE BUY-OUT WAS FINALIZED?

SOLIE: I don't think anybody expected it to come as fast as it did. It certainly was a surprise. There was so much politics that I don't want to get into it all.

KELLER: WHEN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING FROM GEORGIA WAS BROUGHT BACK TO THAT EARLY MORNING TBS TIME SLOT, WHAT WAS THE ATTITUDE OF THE PERSONNEL THEN?

SOLIE: Oh, that was a lot of fun. That was a challenge because we were up against, number one, going on at 7:00 in the morning, we realized for our California viewers it was 4:00 AM. Half the country was going to get us in predawn hours.

KELLER: WHAT LED TO YOUR DEPARTURE FROM GEORGIA?

SOLIE: I had always been doing Florida. And with Georgia, we just agreed to disagree, I moved on to Continental and stayed pretty busy.

KELLER: YOU WERE IN FLORIDA AT DUSTY RHODES' PEAK OF POPULARITY. HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN HIS POPULARITY?

SOLIE: Charisma basically. He just has tremendous charisma. He could relate to anybody. He had a real gift for rapping and he represented "Everyman," so to speak.

KELLER: WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON WORKING WITH DUSTY RHODES?

SOLIE: I would really prefer not make any comments on that.

KELLER: WHAT WERE SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS THAT STAND OUT IN YOUR MIND FROM THE FLORIDA DAYS?

SOLIE: I think probably the quest for the title by Jack Brisco when Dory Funk Jr. held it. Some of the greatest matches I've ever seen were between Brisco and Funk. Also, the Eddie Graham-Molenko feud. That went on for a number of years. Getting the opportunity to watch Don Curtis, The Buffalo Bomber, and Mark Lewin as tag team partners. And the fact that Curtis and I have become very, very close friends. We are still in contact.

KELLER: ARE THERE OTHER WRESTLERS THAT YOU GOT TO BE GOOD FRIENDS WITH?

SOLIE: The late Eddie Graham and I. I respect all of the wrestlers as professional athletes and I hope they respect me as a professional broadcaster. I've stayed friends with a lot of people over the years. I wouldn't want to start listing them and then leave somebody out and hurt their feelings.

KELLER: WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR FAVORITE ERAS ANNOUNCING?

SOLIE: As time goes by, things change. I am just as happy now even though the whole market has changed so drastically now. Ted Turner, who has been a pioneer in broadcasting, so the industry has changed. Because of it's change and because it's a different era and different form of promotion, I enjoy it. It's interesting to see how these new things develop.

KELLER: WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE VIRTUAL ELIMINATION OF THE TERRITORIES AND DOMINATION BY NATIONAL PROMOTIONS AND THE WARS?

SOLIE: It was evolution by Ted Turner. He's the one that did it with the Superstation early on. People in the broadcast industry laughed at him when he went to the satellite and then when he did the CNN situation. They're no longer laughing; they're paying attention to this man, now.

KELLER: DO YOU THINK THE ELIMINATION OF TERRITORIES IS A BETTER WAY OF RUNNING WRESTLING?

SOLIE: I think it's better in many respects. The wrestlers are certainly able to make a lot more money rather than being restricted to one territory or area. Say, for example, Florida. You only have a certain number of major cities in Florida. Now, for example, the wrestlers will wrestle here in Baltimore tonight and tomorrow night in another major city. Frankly it's better for the wrestler because he makes more money.

KELLER: DO YOU THINK, THOUGH, THAT BECAUSE THERE ARE SO FEW TERRITORIES THAT FEWER WRESTLERS ARE ABLE TO MAKE A LIVING?

SOLIE: I don't know that that's necessarily the case. There are several organizations that are functioning. I don't know that there are necessarily fewer wrestlers competing today. I know that when I first got into the sport we used to put on matches with six wrestlers. Now it's eighteen, twenty.

KELLER: WHERE DO YOU SEE WRESTLING GOING IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

SOLIE: I think we'll just have to wait and see. It's such a volatile sport. I certainly see it continuing as a major attraction.

As far as the WWF, I think for the most part there is more wrestling in the NWA. I look for the NWA to have the enduring power.

KELLER: IF THERE WAS ONE MAJOR CHANGE IN WRESTLING OVER THE YEARS THAT YOU COULD TAKE BACK, WHICH WOULD THAT BE?

SOLIE: It's an interesting question. I really can't think of any because today's athlete is bigger, he's faster, he's stronger. That brings about a change in the sport itself. You get more athletes that are going into the air, so to speak. All of the sports have changed. I suppose if one wanted to be nostalgic they could sit back and say, well, the good ol' days, perhaps we didn't have as many environmental problems as we do now, but I think for the most part, each day presents a new challenge or a new perspective.

KELLER: IS THERE A SINGLE MATCH OR FEUD THAT YOU ENJOYED CALLING THE MOST?

SOLIE: Again, I would have to go back to Jack Brisco and Dory Funk. They were master technicians in the ring. I also enjoyed very much Cowboy Bill Watts in action. He was always fun to commentate about. There have been others that have been extremely sharp scientific wrestlers and I prefer that because it gives the commentator a little more versatility in what he's talking about.

KELLER: IS THERE AN ASPECT OF ANNOUNCING YOU ENJOY MOST?

SOLIE: I suppose I prefer calling the action, obviously. I don't think that I fare as well as a color commentator. I really haven't perfected that art yet. It's going to take more work on my part.

I thoroughly enjoy, as a matter of fact, working the 900 line with Lance Russell. It's radio; it really is. I love to build word images, and consequently you can do that with radio. You have to make comments so the listener can get a picture of what's going on. It stimulates the imagination a lot more than watching it on the tube.

KELLER: IF YOU COULD SEE ANY TWO WRESTLERS AGAINST EACH OTHER FROM DIFFERENT TIME PERIODS IN THEIR PRIME, WHAT MATCH WOULD THAT BE?

SOLIE: I would have to say, I would like to see a match between Don Curtis and Jack Brisco. Or Ric Flair and Don Curtis I think would be an outstanding match. Don, of course, was in the University of Buffalo and he was Heavyweight Champion there. Jack was twice NCAA champion. So you've got two wrestlers of great technical skills.

KELLER: WHAT IS THE GREATEST MATCH YOU EVER SAW?

SOLIE: That one's too tough to call. I've seen so many really great matches. It's too tough to pick out a tremendous match from the literally thousands I've seen over the years.

KELLER: I AM GOING TO RUN DOWN A FEW NAMES AND WOULD LIKE YOUR THOUGHTS ON EACH: VINCE MCMAHON SR?

SOLIE: I knew that man quite well and had the utmost respect for Vince McMahon Sr.

KELLER: VINCE MCMAHON JR.

SOLIE: An innovator. No question about it. The man took a product and did an extremely good job of marketing the product. He brought a new dimension to the sport just like Turner brought a new dimension to broadcasting.

KELLER: OLE ANDERSON?

SOLIE: I tell you what, Ole in my opinion is probably one of the greatest minds in the sport today. He's very direct and very to the point. I hold him ina great deal of admiration.

KELLER: HULK HOGAN?

SOLIE: I've known Terry since he got started in professional wrestling. I certainly think he's done a magnificent job. He certainly has. He's made the most of the opportunities that were presented to him, so he's quite an individual.

KELLER: HARLEY RACE?

SOLIE: Probably one of the toughest competitors in the World. Harley was in a severe auto accident years and years ago after he had only been in wrestling one year. They told him that he would never wrestle again, yet he came back to win the World Title on seven different occasions and no wrestler's ever done that. You can only look at Harley Race with the utmost respect.

TOMMY RICH

HARLEY RACE

KELLER: RIC FLAIR?

SOLIE: Great champion. Volatile. Very explosive. But he deserves all the credit he gets.

KELLER: TOMMY RICH?

SOLIE: A young man who perhaps at one point in his career was too much, too soon. But Tommy has made an amazing return to the sport. I look for the possibility that Tommy might regain the World Title some day.

KELLER: BUZZ SAWYER?

SOLIE: The Mad Dog is just that. I've followed his career since he was just an amateur in St. Petersburg, Florida and he is just a very, very tough guy.

KELLER: VERNE GAGNE?

SOLIE: Well, that's my hometown. Verne, I believe was a year or two ahead of me in school and all. Obviously one of the all time greats in the sport.

KELLER: JIM ROSS?

SOLIE: Outstanding guy, no question about that. Very ambitious. Very dedicated to the sport. He puts in a lot of time and a lot of effort. (continued on page 70)

JIM ROSS

I don't know why Turner bought Crockett in the first place. He could have done his own deal. I think he did it out of ethics and character. Let's be honest about it, he didn't have to do it. I don't know what they bought when they bought it.

Jim Ross first got involved in pro wrestling in 1970. Now it is 1990 and Jim Ross is the anchor announcer for World Championship Wrestling. Mr. Ross has announced for Mid-South sports which became Bill Watt's UWF where he received rave reviews as one of, if not the, greatest announcer of this era. In the following "Torch Talk" interview with Wade Keller conducted by phone on July 10th, Mr. Ross discusses how he originally got involved in pro wrestling, his thoughts on wrestling journalism, and the current state of the NWA.

KELLER: HOW DID YOU ORIGINALLY GET INVOLVED IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

ROSS: I was a student at Northeast Oklahoma State University in Tahlequah. I was a member of a fraternity and we did a wrestling match for a fundraiser with Leroy McGurk who promoted in that area. I met Bill Watts at that time. Then we did another one. Then when I got out of college, he (Watts) and I maintained our friendship. He gave me a job working in the Tulsa wrestling office making $150 a week. I did everything from writing publicity and press releases, taking out the trash, lighting LeRoy's cigars. Then I started refereeing and putting rings up, helping run spot shows. So I've done a lot of phases of the business before I really got involved in announcing. I really didn't start announcing wrestling until 1980.

KELLER: WHEN DID YOU ORIGINALLY BEGIN WORKING FOR THE TULSA WRESTLING OFFICE?

ROSS: 1971. I worked for them for a while and then I left wrestling. I bought a department store in my hometown, Westville, Oklahoma. I was there for seven years and out of wrestling, basically. I did a few things, such as refereeing or helping run a few spot shows in the summer time for the fun of it. Then I closed my store and moved to Tulsa. I worked in radio there. Then I became the event coordinator for Tulsa. So I've done a lot of things in wrestling. When I came back to Tulsa in '80, Bill (Watt's) thing was going pretty well and he ends up buying out LeRoy. I went on TV basically as a stand in one of those weeks. You know, one of those stories. It worked out.

To be a good announcer you have to enjoy what you do. And I think you also need a thorough understanding of what the two guys wrestling are trying to accomplish. I think also you can't be talking down to the fans. There are certain basic things Bill Watts taught me regarding respecting the business.

KELLER: HAVE YOU WORKED FOR ANY PROMOTIONS BESIDES MID-SOUTH, THE UWF, AND THE NWA?

ROSS: Nope. Never had.

KELLER: WHO WERE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE WRESTLERS AS A FAN GROWING UP.

ROSS: You have to remember, I grew up in Oklahoma. Probably the biggest star we had then was Danny Hodge. He was the World Jr. Heavyweight Champion, he was on the cover of Sports Illustrated, he was a native Oklahoman, he went to the Olympics, he had won in national boxing, and he was a sports legend. When he got into wrestling, he was the star of the program. He was my first early favorite.

Irish Mike Clancy was another guy that was really good. He recently passed away. He was a county sheriff or deputy in Tulsa when he got out of wrestling. He and his wife ran a restaurant there. He was a real nice guy. He was also the Junior Heavyweight Champion for a while. He was colorful with a lot of charisma.

Those are the two I remember the best when I was young.

KELLER: WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FONDEST MEMORIES GROWING UP AS A FAN?

ROSS: I think probably one my most vivid memories - I had cousins that lived in Oklahoma City. I lived in a little town that was a hundred miles east of Tulsa. My hometown had like a thousand people and I graduated with maybe fifty or sixty kids in my class, so it was small Oklahoma rural community. I had cousins that lived in Oklahoma City which is like a three hour drive away and every summer I used to spend time with them. The first live match I saw was at the stockyards in Oklahoma City. I remember The Assassins were on the card, I think they wrestled the Torres Brothers, Ramone and Alberto. But the main thing I remember is Hodge wrestling Bulldog Don Kent. That was probably one of my fondest early memories when I was really young.

I refereed a World Title match when I was nineteen between Watts and, I think, Dory Funk Jr.

KELLER: SPEAKING OF OFFICIATING, WHEN DID YOU UMPIRE BASEBALL AS IS OFTEN MENTIONED?

ROSS: I went to Umpire School in 1976 and finished seventh in the class among 121 kids and didn't get a job offer. That was fine as I owned the department store at the time. I wanted to learn how to umpire and thought that was the best place to learn how to do it. I umpired baseball in the Southwest Conference in the Big Eight for almost two years, so that was good experience. My roommate is in the American League now; he graduated first in his class.

KELLER: WHO IS THAT?

ROSS: Tim McClellon. Of course, I know King Kaiser and Tim McKeyon and all those guys. Some are instructors and some of them were students, like Tim. I officiated high school football, basketball, and baseball. Football and basketball I did eighteen years. I officiated fourteen state championship games in three sports in Oklahoma. I think it's a record. One year I officiated state finals in three sports in one year. A lot of officials officiate their entire career and don't get to work the finals.

I enjoyed football more than anything. I'm a big football fan. I read a lot about football. I understand it because I never really got away from it officiating all those years. I'd love to have the opportunity to do some football, either play-by-play or color sometime, but I don't expect that to ever happen because of my pro wrestling background.

KELLER: WOULD YOU EVER BE WILLING TO DROP OUT OF WRESTLING FOR A COUPLE YEARS IN ORDER TO ANNOUNCE ANOTHER SPORT?

ROSS: I don't think so. You have to be realistic about your career no matter what you're doing. I think I have a gift to do wrestling. I enjoy doing it and I'm going to get better at it. I have a lot of good years left, I think. I love wrestling. It's unfortunate the biasness other people have against wrestling. It willobviously influence and restrict me from doing other things.

KELLER: SEVERAL MONTHS AGO YOU CAME ACROSS PROBLEMS WHILE TRYING TO ANNOUNCE FOR TBS' U.S. OLYMPIC GOLD. WHAT WERE THOSE PROBLEMS?

ROSS: I did the United States versus Russia of the World Cup. That will be televised in August on U.S. Olympic Gold on TBS. That was a prelude to my assignment on the Goodwill Games. I signed a contract, but then when the people in the United States (Amateur) Wrestling Association saw who I was, they freaked. They made an allegation that I tried to recruit Bruce Bumgardner to join the NWA. And without checking it out, I got relieved of my duties.

KELLER: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WAY TBS TREATED THAT SITUATION?

ROSS: They're going to pay me. I'm going to get my money for it. The money was not why I was doing it. I wanted to do it so I could work with new producers and new

directors and pick up new things and work with people such as Larry King. I wanted to expand my craft. Growing up in Oklahoma I had a very extensive amateur background observing and being around wrestling. The coach of the freestyle team is from Oklahoma. He used to watch me announce when I worked for Watts in the old Mid-South days, LeRoy Smith from Oklahoma State. The top two wrestlers on the team - Kenny Monday is from Tulsa. I saw him wrestle in high school. I knew these kids and they knew me. I thought I had some good inside stuff as far as their preparation and different insight. I think when people see my work in August they will see it's not a problem, I'm just fine.

It's just common sense. TBS didn't want to create a negative environment with the United States Wrestling Association people. I realize that and respect their decision. If the USWA had said, "He's an okay guy and he really worked hard, but we don't want a guy so identified with pro wrestling to be the announcer for the Goodwill Games for our sport." Instead of doing that, they made the allegation that I tried to recruit Bumgardner. I called Bumgardner and talked with him and I had my broadcast partner, Russ Helleckson, come talk with him. He said, that's absolutely ludicrous; it never happened. It was a real political deal. If they would have come to me and said, "Look, you've been selected to do this and we're really uncomfortable, would you mind not doing it," I would have been happy - no, I wouldn't have been happy, but I would have been cooperative for the company's sake and for them. The way it happened was bush league.

I don't want to say TBS didn't stand behind me. My division stood by me, Mr. Petrick and Mr. Herd. But TBS is like a continent with little countries in it. Sometimes these countries have discrepancies. We didn't push it and didn't raise any fuss over it. I didn't want to make a fool of myself by bringing it to the attention of the company, so we let it drop. They're paying me, and paying me well, for not going, so I guess I don't have a lot to gripe about.

KELLER: WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES FOR A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

ROSS: Probably preparation, enthusiasm, product knowledge. You take away any of those three and you're not going to be successful. If you don't understand how a hold works and what a hold is called, no matter how hard you prepare you're going to sound dumb. If you don't have any enthusiasm - I've been accused of being overly enthusiastic and I've got my critics. What I always say is change channels or turn the sound down if I'm that abrasive to some. Because I get excited, not as an actor. When I'm at ringside like I was at this Bash, that was a lot of fun. There are a lot of critics because they would love to trade places with me. Their allegedly mundane lifestyles say, what a neat deal if I could be involved in wrestling. I know I spend a lot of time on preparation. They may be minuscule things. Watts always felt that the wrestlers have two sides, they're human beings and they're wrestlers, so let's talk about both parts of it. We have a little bit of a philosophical disagreement now in the company where some involved are more old-school oriented and they prefer to talk about the match. Well, if you've got a five minute match that's a mismatch with a star versus someone who had never won in their life, I can stretch, but in all honesty when someone has maken no comebacks and they're just gettin' beat up, you have to be a little more creative.

KELLER: A STAFF WRITER OF THE TORCH, BILL KUNKEL, RECENTLY BROUGHT UP A POINT. HE THOUGHT THAT YOU MENTIONING AT THE BASH THAT MEAN MARK CALLOUS HAS A DEGREE IN SPORTS MANAGEMENT TOOK AWAY FROM THE VICIOUSNESS THAT MARK CALLOUS DISPLAYS IN THE RING. DO YOU THINK YOU CAN SOMETIMES GIVE AWAY TOO MUCH INFORMATION?

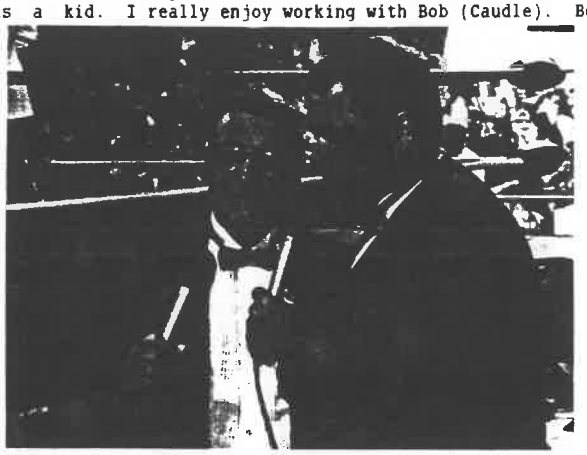
ROSS: That's a fine line. He may be right. I don't think I would do that for Van Vader. Van Vader played football for Colorado and for the Los Angeles Raiders. His real name is Leon White. We're into an age now where there are a lot of big, rough, tough guys. When you stop and think of it, every bad-ass in the NFL came from college and they're image is not real tarnished. I think it shows a side of this guy that he's still 6'9" and he's still 360 pounds kickin' butt, but nobody said they stereotypically have to be oafs and have no intelligence. This is the 1990's, he has his teeth, he doesn't have a beer-belly, he doesn't have scars all over his body. I think your friend is probably right. You can give too much information. I would never say anything to discredit anyone's character or the character we're building. It can happen.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU FEEL ARE YOUR STRONGEST AND WEAKEST QUALITIES AS AN ANNOUNCER?

ROSS: I think one of my strongest points is probably my preparation. My weakest point is I have often times tried to probably make matches that were mediocre, better. And it's not out of trying to insult someone's intelligence, it's trying to do justice to the guys that are working and putting their butts on the line. You feel for them, because they want it to be better, but it's just not working. Every match can't be a classic.

KELLER: WHAT ANNOUNCERS OVER THE YEARS HAVE YOU ADMIRED THE MOST?

ROSS: Wrestling-wise, I watched Gordon because Gordon was accessible. Gordon was a real good announcer, play-by-play guy on the days of TBS when it was new and fresh. I liked Gordon because of his work and his distinctive voice. There was an announcer in Oklahoma by the name of Danny Williams who was a good announcer when I was a kid. I really enjoy working with Bob (Caudle). Bob



is a real pro and Bob has started preparing. I will supply Bob with bios and trivia and various things along those lines. Now Bob has kind of got into it now that we're reaching a national audience and these national audience's are seeing people more often, you have to tell both sides of them and you have to let people know about their background. I don't think you can describe a wristlock or armbar for fifteen, twenty minutes. I admire Bob because Bob never folds under adversity.

KELLER: HOW WOULD YOU COMPARE THE NWA CREW TO WWF ANNOUNCERS?

ROSS: One thing people may not realize about the difference between us and WWF announcers; their pay-per-views are the only thing they do live. They go back in and get chance after chance after chance to say what they want to say. I'm not knocking those guys, I'm just saying we are a different genre when we do these live telecasts. If people haven't done live television, and this distresses me a little bit, I'll hear or read someone saying, "I thought the show was really good, but I didn't like this particular line." It's like umpiring a ballgame, man, you get lots of chances to screw-up. We don't have retakes. We tape everything live. We'll go back in certain situations and re-voice matches for replay or something. But the Clashes, the pay-per-views, the Saturday show, all the leads we do, it's rip and roar and go. It's a different ballgame. It's difficult to compare announcers, even. We're doing the same thing, wrestling. But they're doing it in a post-production facility often times.

KELLER: TO ME, THAT WOULD SEEM LIKE JUST AS MUCH OF A DISADVANTAGE AS AN ADVANTAGE WHEN IT COMES TO ENTHUSIASM.

ROSS: Yeah, a lot of guys have a hard time reenacting it. They do a good job of it. McMahon and Ventura are very good with their voice-overs. Vince is real good about recreating the environment, excitement, enthusiasm. Jesse's just so talented, I don't think it makes a bit of difference to him. He's going to be great if he's live or on tape. He would hurt their broadcasts if he wasn't there. I'd like to work with him some day. He came from that era of, quote, workers, and all that crap. He might be fun to announce with. I admire his work; I admire a lot of things Titan does. They are the standard-bearers as far as promotion and syndication and marketing.

I don't really knock their product. It's just the brand they do. It's like Pepsi has a different taste than Coke, and they're supposed to have. The thing about it is, the critical people about Titan are the fans that understand the inside of the business, therefore they don't respect what they do as far as their in-ring product. But my gosh, you can't knock the success they have had as far as their TV ratings and promoting events. They are basically gearing their product toward a much younger audience than we are. Their fans may not understand a Ricky Steamboat-Ric Flair match. There's a story told there and the story is well-thought-out, and sometimes children with a shorter attention span, that's not a big deal.

KELLER: WHO DO YOU CONSIDER THE TOP FIVE ALL-AROUND

WRESTLERS TODAY BASING IT MAINLY ON WORKRATE?

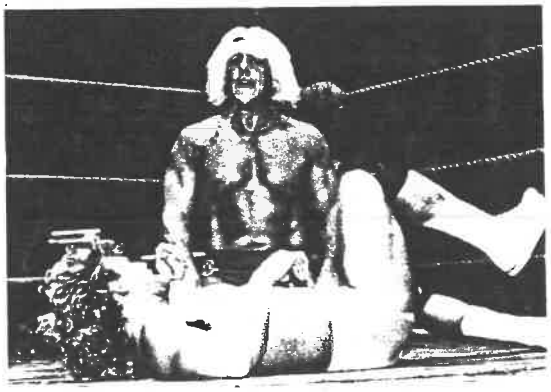
ROSS: That's really hard to say. Obviously Flair has to be in the group. He's still the best. If I'm being objective, and I assume you're advocating my objectivity, you would have to mention Randy Savage and Ted DiBiase. Arn Anderson is a great wrestler. Arn has the ability to have great matches with a lot of people of varying skill levels. I think Barry Windham is that category. Barry, because of outside factors that have happened in his life, Barry hasn't had the chance to build a lot of consistency. But when he's on track, he's as good as there is. If I had the chance to handpick a territory, I would draft Flair, DiBiase, Savage, Anderson, and Windham, I've got myself five heels that I can build on.

That is the most important phase of our business, in my opinion, the villains. Because you can have a super babyface like Hogan, a phenom; we may never exceed anything like him again. But it's easier to build the image of the superhero because all you do is make sure they don't lose much and overcome insurmountable odds. But you need to put them in jeopardy. They've got to be in an environment where the hero's fans really think that they are in trouble.

KELLER: IS THERE SOMEONE YOU CONSIDER THE ALL-TIME GREATEST WRESTLER?

ROSS: That's a tough question. I'm a little defensive. I was in the wrestling business before I was, quote, "smartened up." I felt like I earned the opportunity to understand the inner-workings of the business. A lot of people have come by it, quite frankly, casually. A guy told me once, when you get smartened-up initially, one of the first things you'll do is go tell a friend. But you'll ask him or her not to tell anybody. Then they will go tell someone and say "Don't tell anybody." So when people come to matches and spout off inside terms, it's really distressing. It's an ego problem. It's, "Hey, I want everyone around me to know that I know a little bit more about wrestling than they do, so I'm going to create a little bit of an awareness of the folks around me to let them know I'm smarter than them in this particular area." To me, that's a sign of insecurity.

In the same respect, when people say, this is the greatest wrestler of all time. I haven't been around since "all-time." I never saw Lou Thesz work a match in his prime. I've seen the Funks, I've seen the Briscos, and those guys since the mid-sixties. I was born in '52. I can say from the mid-sixties on who are the greatest I've seen.



RIC FLAIR VS BRIAN PILLMAN

The best worker I have ever seen in my career has been Flair. But to say Flair is the greatest of all-time is unfair to those I haven't seen. But it depends on the match you're looking for. If it's just an out and out brawl you're looking for, then you think about Bruiser Brody or somebody. But I still think Flair is the greatest and he hasn't lost a step. Unless he gets injured, he's as good today at forty as he was at thirty-five. I think the company and previous management did all they could to destroy his credibility by having him beg and hang-on and put his feet on the ropes.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE WAY PRO WRESTLING IS COVERED JOURNALISTICALLY?

ROSS: I guess it depends on who your audience is. I think Bill Apter has great magazines. I think Dennis Brent is one of the best journalists in wrestling that I've read, knowing his dedication. Probably one of the best kept secrets is our arena magazine. It's slick, it's laid out well. I think the Apter people do a good job.

It seems both of those people have a clear-cut focus as to who reads their material. Sometimes you'll see this other stuff, a newspaper article, even the National. I wonder, is it for casual fans or is it written to the inside fans? Sometimes they use fact, the next paragraph has fiction, and then more fact. I see inconsistencies in it. I'm real defensive about the inside knowledge being made so public because it's like guys can't wait to tell ya - Siskel and Ebert usually don't tell you the end of the movie. The media never tells what character gets killed off a soap opera. Again, to predicate their own egos or to impress somebody, the inside journalists can't wait to divulge the end of the movie. For example, some guys going to leave the territory. Then you say, "So and so is going to leave the territory even though he's got matches with the champion you expect no title changes because soon he's going to be working with a new employer." Along those lines.

KELLER: LET ME THROW OUT AN ANALOGY. ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY SAYS, "TED DANSON IS LEAVING "CHEERS" NEXT YEAR, SO DON'T EXPECT HIM AND DIANE TO GET MARRIED?" THAT IS PUBLICIZED OPENLY?

ROSS: I don't what we are, if you're going to write an entertainment column or if you're going to write a pseudo-sports column. I think if it effects the masses or the impact of a TV show, then it should be printed in a way that doesn't divulge the ending of a show. Nobody wants to be positioned as an idiot or ill-informed. There are more people that are not insiders than are insiders. Would you agree with that?

KELLER: YES. BY FAR.

ROSS: When some of these journalists, not Apter, but other stuff. Are you writing to the small minority who know the inner-workings of wrestling or are you writing to the casual fans, I think they have other interests in wrestling.

KELLER: DO YOU THINK IT IS OKAY THAT BOTH JOURNALISTIC APPROACHES EXIST OR DO YOU WISH NEWSLETTERS WOULD CEASE TO EXIST?

ROSS: I'm the last person in the world to say a person shouldn't have the right to make a living doing what they do, as long as it's legal and ethical. So I'm not going to say you're publication, or Beverly's, or Meltzer's, or anybody else's should stop. You've got the right to do it. Conceptually what you're saying is true. Often times (newsletters get) bad information and some of that information has been harmful because it's not been checked out. If it's stated as a rumor, but I know some guys can't wait. There's even competition among the newsletter people. Sometimes somebody goes with heresy or a loose rumor. A lot of guys that are former employees of our company, and the same with Titan, would love to see the negatives flow and the atmosphere become a little more negative.

I think the newsletters should stay in business if they choose to. I enjoy reading about the results, I really like to hear what the fans say as long as they're objective.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE WAY WRESTLING HAS PROGRESSED OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS, FROM AN ANNOUNCING PERSPECTIVE?

ROSS: Hey, it's never going to be like Brisco and Funk again. It's not going to happen. Those guys are over. A TV station or a network is not going to tolerate violence to that degree, with people getting hit in the groin or with Jerry Lawler getting pulled into the post, and they juice their arms, and all that stuff. That may happen in Memphis on WMC television, and it may happen in Dallas at the Sportatorium on Channel 11, but it won't happen long and it won't happen with any regularity because programers are not going to tolerate it. A great number of products they sell through wrestling are targeted at teenagers and kids. They know the Abdullah's and the Brody's and the 60 minute Broadways with Funk and Brisco are not going to happen again. As much as I'd like to see it be more realistic, because that's my style.

I don't want to insult anyone's intelligence. I'm not a clown. I'm not ever going to be involved in an angle. I'm not ever going to get a pie in my face. I'm not going to get beat up. I'm never going to be a tag team wrestler in a match. I mean never. That's not my deal. Okerlund's kind of a comic. Now he's a hell of an announcer. I've heard him do straight announcing, and he does a great job. but his character which he is cast to do, is not taken as seriously as it could be. Now they're not concerned about that. He's a funny guy, humorous looking, little bald headed guy with moustache, short stature. He's perfect at what he does. The kids and young adults get a kick out of Mean Gene. Serious fans, again which is a minority, can take him or leave him. I wish you could go back to the day where there was more athleticism, but man, there's so much pressure to get TV ratings and everything is sizzle. It's like the tabloids. Whoever has the most outrageous, outlandish headline sells the tabloid. They certainly don't buy it for the journalistic content. It's kind of the same analogy here.

I wish we could get back to more of the actual skill, and explaining the holds and the strategies, see great guys wrestle. They're not patient and they want

sensationalism. They want that burst of unpredictability and bizarreness, it would seem, then move on to something else, whatever else is trendy in wrestling.

There's only so many things you can do on wrestling TV shows. You can talk about it, you can wrestle, you do features with wrestlers outside the ring. You can go to the ring or leave the building and take the camera and focus it on the wrestler doing something other than wrestling. There's not a hell of a lot you can do with it. It's unfortunate that we're on this trend, there's squash matches and talking about them. I understand squash matches are necessary to establish people as stars and winners, but I think everybody in our industry does much too much of it.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU DO INSTEAD OF SQUASH MATCHES?

ROSS: I think the Mid-South TV formula that we did is what is needed right now for our television audience. We knew what we were going to promote next week. We knew what the big thing was going to be and built on it.

I love the stories (blaming the UWF TV for low crowds, such as) "Watts in the end was losing it all." Our territory was based in the oil regions. Now you tell me any business in that same period of time other than repossessions and umemployment type stuff that was flourishing. Louisiana, our biggest state that we were making the most money in had an all-time record of unemployment. It wasn't a wrestling problem. It was an economy problem. At the same time our houses were dropping, our TV ratings were just as strong as ever, if not better. The people could see it for free. The interest was always there. There wasn't any disposable income in that area. We might have made a mistake trying to replace the Dog, and I think Bill would tell you that.

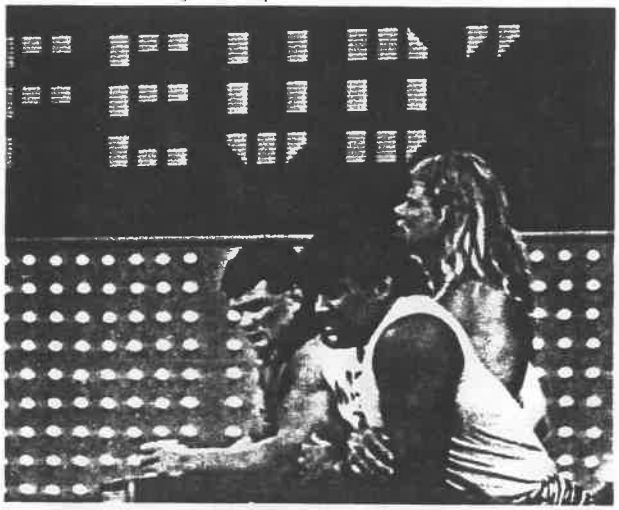
KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE LAST TURBULENT YEAR THE NWA HAS HAD. WAS IT A PROFITABLE LEARNING EXPERIENCE OR WAS IT LOST TIME AND MONEY?

ROSS: It was inevitable. I don't know why Turner bought Crockett in the first place. He could have done his own deal. I think he did it out of ethics and character. Let's be honest about it, he didn't have to do it. I don't know what they bought when they bought it. They bought a few TV stations; they bought some contracts with some talent. All that would have come over. Crockett's days were numbered. They were a month away from probably bankruptcy and Turner bailed them out bigtime. It didn't have to happen, because the wrestlers would have come in a heartbeat, Flair and the whole group. The same thing that killed Crockett killed us the first year, exorbitant contracts for guaranteed money. That's a kiss of death.

KELLER: WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, WOULD BE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT IMPROVEMENTS IN THE NWA?

ROSS: I think one of things would be improved television syndication. In other words upgrading to better stations within the local markets with a faster-paced episodic television show.

The second thing would be to improve our public relations efforts and our promotional efforts within the market to not only promote our live events, but to take our stars like Sting and put them in other venues and other



THE STEINERS & LEX LUGER (RS)
ON FAMILY FEUD

arenas so that new people and new audiences can see this guy.

Then probably the third thing would be to establish an organized training facility where we can control our own destiny in the creation of new talent.

KELLER: WOULD IT BE NECESSARY TO HAVE A SMALL REGIONAL CIRCUIT CREATED OR AFFILIATED WITH THE TRAINING CENTER?

ROSS: I think that probably an extension and a spin-off of that training facility is to run some smaller little territories where that talent is cultivated, and it's nurtured, and it's groomed, and then you bring them to the big shows.

KELLER: WHO WOULD YOU HAVE RUNNING THE TRAINING CENTER?

ROSS: Oh, gosh, there's a lot of people that can do that. You would want somebody who was known as a "good worker," somebody that could work a match, not just a gimmick worker. It would provide a good place for people to train. We've got guys whose careers are winding down, it's a good place to put people like that. Somewhere down the road, that would be a great place for Ricky Morton in a few years, ten years, because Ricky can work. Ric Flair would be a great teacher. But that's years down the road, but you know what I'm saying. Bobby Eaton would be a great teacher. There's a place for that.

If we did those three things and did them well, I think we'd be much better off right now.

KELLER: I AM GOING TO RUN DOWN A FEW NAMES AND WOULD LIKE A FEW THOUGHTS ON EACH PERSON: JIM HERD?

ROSS: He's a tough leader that's learning more about wrestling every day. I think he's gonna be able to pull it together. I think he was probably surprised by the state of the business when he inherited the job, but I think he's taken a cram course in "Wrestling 101." His own self-admission is that he's made some mistakes, but they weren't out of lack of effort. He works hard and he's learning the business from the inside and the front lines. He gets fired on every day and he's not in a very amiable position. I think he's a tough leader that's going to endure.

KELLER: WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON EDDIE GILBERT?

ROSS: Eddie's a unique young man. He is highly intelligent. He's a great worker. Wrestling's his life. I can identify with that, it's my life, too. It's good and it's bad. Wrestling was a contributing factor to my divorce because my ex-wife was very uncomfortable with what I did for a living. And I loved what I did for living. I think that wrestling in some shape or form was also a contributing factor in Eddie and Missy getting a divorce.

But Eddie Gilbert is a talented young man; he's highly intelligent. I think his longevity and his biggest contribution to wrestling will be behind the scenes and not in the ring. He's a hell of a worker, but I think he has the ability to be one of the great minds with booking and angles and he changes with the times. I just think his best days aren't going to be wrestling Jerry Lawler at the Mid-South Coliseum Monday Nights in Memphis. That's a nice deal now and it's happened before, and that's fine, but that's not his calling. He needs to get into an environment where he can learn and keep learning, work with an experienced booker like an Ole Anderson or a Pat Patterson and eventually move to that level.

KELLER: LANCE RUSSELL?

ROSS: Lance is a great pro and he's a fine gentleman and it was one of the great privileges in my career when we hired Lance to come here. He's a good man, a good human being. I think Lance does a good job. There are some that think he's too Southern or too laid back. I think Lance does a great job. We cannot reenact what he had in Memphis, the ninety minute live deal where they could stop and talk. National TV has to be more fast paced. But I think Lance is one of the nicest guys in professional wrestling. He's a real asset to our company.

KELLER: ARE THERE POLITICAL REASONS WE DO NOT SEE HIM ON PAY-PER-VIEWS AND CLASHES?

ROSS: No, not really, not political at all. One of our main money strings is our (900) hotline. Quite frankly he's just really good at doing that hotline and he does that around the country. He's the liaison between WCW and Turner Home Entertainment with the hotline. That's just one of his job descriptions So when we do the big event, he usually handles that because that's really his area of responsibility. Inside the company I've said, "Schiavone can do the PPV or Lance can do it." They don't want to do that. So, whether they're right or they're wrong, I volunteer. It's absolutely not political. I'd love to work with Lance. We make too much money on that hotline and that's his baby, that's where they place him.

KELLER: STEVE WILLIAMS?

ROSS: Well, Doc's the toughest guy in wrestling. He's the most physically intimidating wrestler I've been around. Any wrestler will tell ya' he's tougher than heck. I think he's probably doing right now the right thing (by wrestling in Japan). He's making a lot of money and gaining a lot of experience. He is a star, but he could be a bigger star under the right circumstances and I hope that he's back here wrestling for us, at least on a part time basis. He's personally a good friend. Often

 (continued on page 70)

MICK KARCH

Mick Karch truly needs little introduction to longtime TorchReaders. He has been part of the TorchStaff since the PWT ANNUAL I, two years ago. Mick is living a wrestling fan's dream, hosting a local wrestling block in the area in which he grew-up. He currently is the lead play-by-play announcer for the PWA independent group based out of Minneapolis in addition to host of "Saturday Night At Ringside." His sense of humor and sarcastic nature come through in his announcing and his writing (see "Best of the Lean Mean Machine" elsewhere in this book). In the following "Torch Talk" interview conducted by Wade Keller, Mick discusses being president of the Nick Bockwinkel Fan Club for over fifteen years, his announcing duties with the AWA, IWA, and PWA, and his journey to being current host of "Saturday Night At Ringside."

MICK KARCH ON HIS "SATURDAY NIGHT AT RINGSIDE" SET.

WADE KELLER: COULD YOU EXPLAIN WHAT SNR IS?

MICK KARCH: Saturday Night At Ringside is what I always wanted to see when I was a kid in that it involved the wrestling fan. It's loose and it's fun and you've got someone who is talking on the fan's level and not trying to BS anyone within reason - within the limitations of what I can do as host. But it's basically as close to a kayfabe sheet of the air as I can get without overstepping my bounds.

We sandwich my local segments around USWA Challenge and NWA World Wide and I have about twenty-six minutes of airtime each week, basically five minute segments. One with a "Ringsider of the Week." Another with a wrestler if one is available that week. Five minutes of "Fan Feedback," "Trivia," "Supertrivia," and "Video Vault." Basically they are all five minute spots that I incorporate into the show both to involve, not only the fans, but to have a good time from my end of it. Like the "Video Vault," those are things I'd like to see on the air, so I have fun on it.

KELLER: HOW DID YOU BECOME HOST OF SNR?

KARCH: I was working for the AWA at the time, this would be January of '88. I missed an AWA TV taping in Grand Forks, ND and the AWA, I think it was Mike Shields, was not very excited about the idea of me missing the taping. The reason I did was one, I wouldn't get the time off from work, and two, it was the dead of winter and there was a blizzard. Right after that they brought in Lee Marshall and I was told at the time that the next taping Lee Marshall was on was a one-shot deal. February 4th of that year, I asked Verne Gagne again, "Is that just a one-shot deal for Lee and am I coming back?" At which point Verne said, "Is it worth it to you to pay your own flight fare for the opportunity to be on national television." And I said, "No." He kind of chuckled, but I don't think either one of us realized that I was done with the AWA.

Simultaneously at the time, Paul E. Dangerously called and told me there was an opportunity opening up at Channel 23 in Minneapolis. He had gotten wind of this from Joe Pedicino that TV23 was looking to run a wrestling block. They were going to be moving what had been a Saturday morning slot to a Saturday prime time evening slot. He suggested I call Joe Pedicino, which I did. He explained to me what they were looking for, that this was the kind of thing that he and Bonnie Blackstone were trying in other markets for various wrestling blocks. He suggested I go to TV23 and apply for the job, which I did. I talked to Mary O'Neil who was producing the show and I didn't hear anything from her for four or five weeks after I originally interviewed. Then, as it turned out, she called and said come down and audition for the spot, write up five minutes of your own stuff that you would do on the air, we'll give you a screen test, and that's it. The job was mine.

When I was originally hired, I was to do a finish for one program and a lead-in for the other one. And everything since then has been my idea. The twenty-six minutes actually originated when we were running four-and-a-half to five hours. We were running all those back-to-back, the NWA and POWW and the IWA and PWTW, so I had this twenty-six minutes spaced out over four, five hours. When they dumped the other shows, I really assumed they were going to cut my spots to, but the ratings indicated my local tie-ins were what more people were watching, so they left them in.

KELLER: WHAT KIND OF PREPARATION GOES INTO EACH EPISODE OF YOUR WRESTLING BLOCK?

KARCH: It used to be a lot more than it is. When I first got it, I memorized my lines and would write a script a little bit every night of the week. Now, it's a matter of viewing the two shows. They will send me a copy of the NWA and USWA shows to preview. I'll write a script on the basis of what happens during that show. I contact the guest, the ringsiders, and the wrestlers. The station does none of that. They leave the whole choreography of the show and the creative control to me. I think preparation, you're probably looking at three to four hours total preparation a week. When I get to the studio, maybe fifteen minutes are spent talking to the guests beforehand. Beyond that, it's pretty much off-the-cuff, and often times I'll just wing it and ad lib.

KELLER: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR RECENT SNR SECOND ANNIVERSARY SHOW.

KARCH: The anniversary show was basically a brainstorm of mine in the sense that I knew we had a really good collection of clips from the first two years. Knowing that we did not have a really good following initially, I wanted to share some of the stuff we had done early on. Then I wanted to do something unique and different than we had done in the first two years. Being a nostalgia buff, I thought that something that hadn't been done before would be to get a group from the "golden age" to appear on the show. It was easy to get some of them because they were local; Larry Hennig, Stan Kowalski, Wally Karbo, Butch Levy, and Al DeRusha were all right here. Then I wanted to bring in somebody very, very special and that's why we went with the Mad Dog (Vachon). For me it was time warp, it was heaven, it my youth revisited all over again. I can only liken it to somebody sitting with a Harmon Killebrew or a Willy Mays or a Johnny Unitis or something like that. These are the guys that I grew up with and got the initial interest in wrestling and my fondest memories are from the old days. For me it couldn't have been better.

Mad Dog, in particular, it was a kick to have him on it. I realized what a super guy he is. When I contacted the Dog, not knowing what his physical condition was, I really wanted him to come up. When we finally made contact with him, there was a question if we would get his tickets to him in time, Mad Dog said, "I've never missed a commitment yet,and even if I don't get the ticket,I'll still be there. To me, that was just extraordinary. He absolutely relished being with the guys again.

(left to right) STAN KOWALSKI, BARON VON RACSHKE, MICK KARCH, LARRY HENNIG, AL DERUSHA, WALLY KARBO, AND MAD DOG VACHON ON THE SNR SET FOR THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY SHOW.

KELLER: AFTER THE TAPING WAS OVER, DID YOU GUYS GO OUT FOR DINNER?

KARCH: Yeah, we went to an Italian restaurant in St. Paul and didn't actually eat. Everybody basically sat around and drank beer. What was phenomenal about this, was as soon as we walked into the restaurant, hordes, literally, of people were yelling, "Larry Hennig," "Mad Dog," "Big K." It was like everybody instantly knew these people. You're not talking about 1990's wrestlers where Tommy Jammer would walk in, I don't mean to pick on Tommy, but one out of fifty would know him; everybody went nuts. Tables of people were buying rounds for our table and coming up for autographs. It was just phenomenal. The greatest part was to sit and listen to these guys sharing stories of the old days and road trips and the heyday of the AWA. I can't describe it to you.

KELLER: BESIDES THE ANNIVERSARY SHOW, WHAT ARE YOUR FONDEST SNR MEMORIES?

KARCH: There's been a lot of them. You know, it's funny, I can't pinpoint one particular guest that I've enjoyed most. I think when I've had the most fun at the show is when things have gone really smooth and I've cracked some one-liners that I know in my own mind are going to go over well with at least the more Torch-Observer type. I really enjoyed having Pat Tanaka on the show. The thing we did with Brad Rheingans was very memorable. When I had Kenny Jay on the couple of times I've had him on, I mean he's such a nice guy, he makes everything go well. I've enjoyed the on-locations that we've done, although the first one we did in Windom Park, I was about two months into the show and I was kind of leery and uptight about it. I can't really pinpoint one specific night.

KELLER: WHAT IS THE MOST FRUSTRATING PART OF DOING SNR?

KARCH: The most frustrating times are when you have an interview where the person you're interviewing has nothing to say or won't say anything. Then it's up to me to carry it. I don't like to do that because people get twenty minutes of me anyway. If you get a wrestler that stands there and is basically immobile and very mundane, or ringsiders who get tongue-tied because I have to sweat through that, and there's no way you want to say to somebody, "That stunk, let's do that again."

KELLER: WHO HAVE BEEN YOUR BEST AND WORST CELEBRITY GUESTS?

KARCH: You're asking me which wrestlers gave the worst interview?

KELLER: EXACTLY.

KARCH: Tommy Jammer was very, very stiff the first time he was on and I think he'll be the first to admit it. Eddie Sharkey, again the first time. I think the second time he loosened up a lot. Then again, Eddie was giving the same interview twenty-five years ago. The first time that Wayne Bloom and Brad Rheingans were on, and they'll admit to this too, I'm sure, it was a six minute interview that seemed like six hours. I can't believe it's the same Wayne Bloom that's on the tube right now.

I thoroughly enjoyed the interviews with Nick Bockwinkel and Jim Brunzell. Bockwinkel, because I've known the guy for twenty years and adored the guy for that long. That was the first time I ever interviewed him for television. That was a thrill. Jim Brunzell was very open and very honest. I felt very good after that because Brunzell said it was the best interview he'd been through in fifteen years, so I was really honored. Wally Karbo was another one. That short interview was probably another big one because he was my mentor in the business and stuck by me when nobody else would. I have waited forever to interview Wally, too, and it was really special because Wally isn't granting interviews to anybody.

KELLER: HOW LONG DO YOU SEE YOURSELF DOING SNR?

KARCH: I would like to do it as long as the show could run. To project if the show will be on in ten years or fifteen years, the station is on shaky ground. If the station survives, I love what I'm doing.

KELLER: IS SNR JUST A LABOR OF LOVE OR IS THERE MONETARY INCENTIVE?

KARCH: I love what I'm doing. It is a labor of love because I'm doing what I dreamed of doing since I was nine years old and I'm doing it in my own hometown. I've turned down other offers and I'm very happy with it. For the amount of time I actually tape the show, they pay me very well, and so would I do it for free? Probably not, but if the station couldn't pay me, I'd hate to give it up.

KELLER: DO YOU HAVE A JOB BESIDES SNR?

KARCH: Yes. I work full-time at a local utility and I've been doing that for about eleven years.

KELLER: HOW DID YOU GET YOUR JOB WITH THE AWA?

KARCH: That's really interesting. I was writing for the

PAT TANAKA WITH MICK KARCH ON THE ORIGINAL SNR SET.

AWA doing publicity for them since about 1973 and I had kind of tossed my hat in the ring and made my desire to work for them known for many, many years as far as a broadcaster is concerned. It basically fell on deaf ears. My understanding is that neither Verne nor Greg Gagne were interested in hiring me. Certainly the promotional war opened the door for me. I'm sure if the AWA was the only show in town, to this day I would not have gotten the break. I think it got to the point where Gene Okerlund had left and (Ken) Resnick [see "Torch Talk" elsewhere] had left them and it was kind of a revolving door thing. And then I got a call one day from Greg Gagne. He said, "How would you like to work for the AWA?" I went down and did a couple of auditions. Verne said, "How would you like to go to Las Vagas with us to be a ring announcer?" That was it.

KELLER: WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS IN LAS VEGAS?

KARCH: Las Vegas was a real thrill. Just being there and on ESPN and the wrestlers were great to me. Paul E. Dangerously was there at the time and made me feel very, very comfortable. I felt like I had a real ally in him. Rob Trongard has taken his knocks as a broadcaster, but he was very supportive and I've developed a really good relationship with him.

I had some bad incidents in Vegas, but on the overall, I think I went out there five or six times with them and it was a lot of fun.

KELLER: WHAT WERE SOME OF THE BAD INCIDENTS?

KARCH: Well, the worst incident has been well-documented. Verne got rather upset at me for something I thought was rather insignificant. At the Showboat, one of the last times I worked for the AWA, he kind of harassed me publicly. Without a doubt that was the worst. It was probably one of the most eye-opening experiences I've had in wrestling.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK OF VERNE GAGNE?

KARCH: I think Verne is all right. He's got a lot of enemies. A lot of people talk down about him, and certainly the incident I had with him in Las Vegas left a bad taste in my mouth, but he did have the decency to call me back. I had written Verne a letter explaining my dissatisfaction with what had transpired in Las Vegas and Verne had the decency and gumption to call me up and apologize for it - in his own way. I get along well with Verne. He's always complimentary to me and he treats me very well.

KELLER: HOW ABOUT GREG GAGNE?

KARCH: I think Greg hated my guts for years. I think primarily because when I was a fan attending the TV studio matches, I always cheered for the heels and I know it just drove Greg out of his mind. When I started to work for them, I think Greg started to gain respect for me. And all the time I was in Vegas and to this day - I don't know what he says behind my back - but he always treats me with respect and he's very cordial to me and very complimentary toward SNR. So I have a much different opinion of Greg today than I did years ago and I hope it's the same on his end.

KELLER: WOULD YOU EVENTUALLY LIKE TO MOVE ON TO THE NWA OR THE WWF IF SNR EVENTUALLY ENDED?

KARCH: That's hard to say. I have probably burned my bridge with the WWF and I don't know that I feel really bad about that, either. The NWA, I would love to work for the NWA. It's kind of hard, because I'd like to have my cake and eat it too in the sense that I wouldn't want to do a lot of travelling and I'd love to work for the NWA. As I said, the WWF is probably a dead issue. But I like what I do. Marty O'Neil was very popular in his hometown. He was

a big fish in a small pond. And I guess I'm happy with that, at least for now. I don't know what the future holds.

KELLER: HOW HAVE YOU BURNED YOUR BRIDGE WITH THE WWF?

KARCH: About a month after I started working with Channel 23, I got a call from Jack Lanza. At the time I was offered at least an audition, not necessarily a job, with the WWF because they were doing a taping in Duluth, Minnesota. Basically, one thing led to another and I opted not to go to work for the WWF at the time. The timing of it was wrong. It's a strange set of circumstances that led to anger on Lanza's part toward me. Since that time, the WWF has basically closed the door to SNR completely. They won't give us press-passes, they won't give us access to the wrestler, and the whole thing basically just stinks at this point.

KELLER: HOW WAS YOUR RECENT EXPERIENCE WITH THE IWA?

KARCH: It was a grueling night. The matches were held in a relatively small high school gym outside of Scraton, Pennsylvania. It was very hot in the building. I called twenty-eight matches. At the start of the evening it was a packed house. By 12:30 when it finished we were down to about a tenth of what we started with. I enjoyed the experience. I enjoyed working with Dallas Page. There were some excellent matches. Terry Taylor and I spent a lot of time together talking. He's a very interesting guy, very off-the-wall. I enjoyed the experience. I hope it does me some good. If Rob (Russen) wants me back, I'll be back.

KELLER: HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE TOP ANNOUNCERS TODAY?

KARCH: That's difficult. If you're talking play-by-play, I don't necessarily know I'd go much beyond Jim Ross. I think that Jim Ross is just great and I've enjoyed his stuff from the old UWF days. Lance Russell is excellent. Believe it or not, I get a kick out of Gorilla Monsoon, as hokey as he is. If he's bouncing off Bobby Heenan, I get a kick out of him. I don't think he's necessarily a good announcer. I like Vince McMahon occasionally, particularly when he picks on the jobbers. Then again, I don't know that makes Vince a great announcer, I'm just talking in terms of the ones I enjoy listening to. All humility aside, I think I do a pretty good job.

KELLER: HOW ABOUT SOME OF THE NEWER ANNOUNCERS?

KARCH: You better put Chris Cruise above. Chris reminds me a lot of myself. And I think he did a very, very good job. I hope he gets the recognition from the wrestling fans that is due him. Lee Marshall I think is good and very professional. I think he is a much better play-by-play man than he is doing an interview. Ralph Strangis (AWA), at this point and time, I find a lot of fault with Ralph Strangis. I think right now he's enthusiastic to a fault. There's nothing wrong with being enthused with what you're doing. I get the impression he's delighted to be in the position he's in, but I think he is the king of overkill. He has the tendency when he and Greg are together to talk right over Greg. He's almost doing a responsive reading. His lips are moving while Greg is talking. But he's new, so maybe that will change.

KARCH: HOW DO YOU THINK WRESTLING PLAY-BY-PLAY SHOULD BE HANDLED?

KARCH: I think a really good blend would be the seriousness of Chris Cruise and the excitability of Jim Ross. I think you've even got an extreme there. I think what Ross does with a Flair-Steamboat match is without peer. I think what Chris Cruise has done on television for a television taping was excellent. In the sense that's low-keyed, but not mundane. I think if there's such a thing as a blend between Ross and Cruise, I think that would be ideal... and maybe I'm there. But I like to get sarcastic. I don't talk down to the fans, but I think I poke fun at the boys occasionally. Maybe that's another ingredient.

KELLER: WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS FOR A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

KARCH: A public perception of believability and trust in you. A love of the business itself, to the extent that you're not just there to do a job, but you love wrestling itself. I suppose a certain amount of charisma is number three. But you can have all the charisma in the world, but if people don't believe you, what good does it do?

KELLER: WHO DO YOU THINK ARE THE WORST ANNOUNCERS RIGHT NOW?

KARCH: I don't think Gordon Solie is a bad announcer. I think Gordon is kind of stumbling, which is too bad. I still think he is very good. I don't want to say Ralph Strangis is the worst announcer, I don't think that's the case. Superstar Graham, I haven't heard him for a while, but he was pathetic. Even Lord Alfred Hayes, I liked the guy, but for some reason I don't enjoy listening to his commentary. I don't know off hand really that there's anyone who stinks.

KELLER: HOW ABOUT NICK BOCKWINKEL AS A COLOR COMMENTATOR?

KARCH: I think Nick is very good. He certainly adds another dimension to color commentary if you're looking for insightfulness there is probably nobody better than Nick. The AWA stopped using him in that capacity, probably because when you're recording voice-overs, Nick does not project really well. That's the only thing you can find at fault is that he is not really excitable behind the microphone, but that's not really a fault, either.

KELLER: WHO DO YOU PERSONALLY LIKE IN THIS BUSINESS?

KARCH: Nick Bockwinkel, definitely. Curt Hennig. Buddy Wolfe when he was wrestling was a great guy to deal with. A lot of the PWA guys. Eddie Sharkey is terrific. I enjoy a lot of the guys who work for him today. I get a charge out of Adnan El Kaissie. Mad Dog Vachon was great.

KELLER: WHO HAVE YOU RUN INTO THAT YOU REALLY DISLIKE?

KARCH: Billy Robinson. Billy Robinson, at least going back to when he was a star here in the AWA, was extremely egotistical to the point that he got out of the ring on a television taping one night and slapped a fan on national television because of the fan giving him a hard time. He didn't like the people who supported Bockwinkel. It's a little difficult when you're sitting there with your girlfriend who later became my wife and prior to a TV taping Billy Robinson sits down next to her and asks her to lunch while you're sitting there; it's difficult to like a guy like that.

I get along better with him now, but Roger Kent and I did not get along for many years. He figured that I was after his job and made it very clear to me that he would resort to anything to keep his position.

I had some run-ins with Larry Heinemi. I'm sure if I thought about it, there are a lot more I probably haven't been able to stomach.

KELLER: IF YOU RAN INTO A FAN WHO WAS A FAN LIKE YOU WERE WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER, HOW NOW WOULD YOU SEE YOURSELF?

KARCH: It's a different wrestling crowd today. Three-quarters of the fans attending wrestling today are like I was back then. I think a perfect example is when you watch some of the TBS shows and the fans had heavily booed the Dudes, that's the kind of fan that I was. So if I ran into that fan today, I would get along really well with them. Fifteen years ago wrestling fans were not at all like they are today, not at all.

KELLER: IN WHAT WAY?

KARCH: I would say it is a much smarter crowd. I would say if three-quarters of an arena is what you call excessively smart to the business, fifteen years ago I think the percentage was much lower. Even if the hardcore believers amounted to fifteen, twenty percent, I think there was probably twenty-five to thirty percent of the fans that were at least semi-believers and I don't think that is the case today.

KELLER: DO YOU HAVE ANY REGRETS CONCERNING YOUR ANNOUNCING CAREER?

KARCH: Yeah, I think in retrospect I wish I had been more aggressive in pursuing a position with the AWA. I basically let them walk on me in the sense that I got as far as taking pictures ringside, but I wasn't allowed in the lockerroom. I never really went up to Wally Karbo or Verne Gagne or Greg Gagne and said, "Hey, I know what's going on, can we sit down and talk." I don't know that would have made any difference. I still think it was the promotional war that opened the doors for me.

One thing that I really regret, and it's probably something that I didn't have any control over, and it's kind of an oddball thing to say, my dad was tremendously proud of my accomplishments in wrestling, even the little ones, like getting my name in a magazine for running a fan club for Bockwinkel. He would get so excited he would take the magazine to work and so on and so forth. My big regret is that things happened for me after my dad died and that he never got to see me on television because he would have been thrilled.

KELLER: ANY FINAL COMMENTS?

KARCH: I wish you well. Thanks for the opportunity. I think you have a tremendous publication and you have a great future in this business. ***

THE PRO WRESTLING TORCH WEEKLY

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DAVE BROWN

I suppose one of the biggest shocks ever was when I was sitting in the studio there one day and Jerry Lawler, who at the time was just a punk-kid wrestler, comes in to wrestle Jackie Fargo and everyone just figured it was going to be another one of those where Lawler just gets kicked, that Fargo beats the heck out of him, and Lawler comes in and slaps him in the face...

Mention the names Dave Brown and Lance Russell and most wrestling fans will agree, for over twenty years they were the heart and soul of Memphis wrestling. Dave Brown played the straight man for Lance Russell until Lance left Memphis for the NWA in 1989. Since then, Dave Brown has been hosting Memphis' live USWA Saturday morning show on WMCT while continuing weather reports for the station. With over twenty-five years of sitting behind the desk during the wrestling shows, Dave Brown has a lot of memories. The following "Torch Talk" was conducted by Wade Keller on June 8, 1990 via phone with Dave Brown, who not only concluded a phone conversation with his mother to do the interview, but also had to break from the interview at one point to tell Memphis viewers "tomorrow's forecast."

WADE KELLER: HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

DAVE BROWN: It was the first television job I ever had. I was doing rock and roll radio and my boss, well he was not really my boss - he worked in television while I worked at the radio station in the same building - Lance Russell came to me and said, "My co-host is leaving and I need somebody to help me out. If you ever want to work in television, this would be a good job for you to take. It will teach you to think on your feet. It will be great training for anything else you might try to do in television later on." It was some of the greatest advise I ever had. I accepted it.

I wasn't really a very big wrestling fan. As a matter of fact, I didn't like wrestling when I started doing it. Now, that was in January of 1967. So here we are, twenty-three years later, and I can't wait to get here on Saturday and see what's going to happen next.

KELLER: DID YOU DISLIKE WRESTLING WHILE YOU WERE GROWING UP?

BROWN: No, I didn't really have a dislike for it, I just wasn't really a wrestling fan. It was just one of those things that I never really expected to be doing, but it worked out pretty well, I guess.

KELLER: I UNDERSTAND WHEN LANCE RUSSELL LEFT MEMPHIS IN FAVOR OF THE NWA, YOU WERE HESITANT TO REPLACE HIM AS THE MAIN HOST?

BROWN: It was a tough situation to be in because my primary job is doing weather for the NBC station here, one of the top rated stations in the country. I wanted to make sure that neither bumped into the other. And it's very easy to do when you're not the main host on the wrestling show. You can kind of float in and out as you feel comfortable doing it. It's a little bit different when you're the main host.

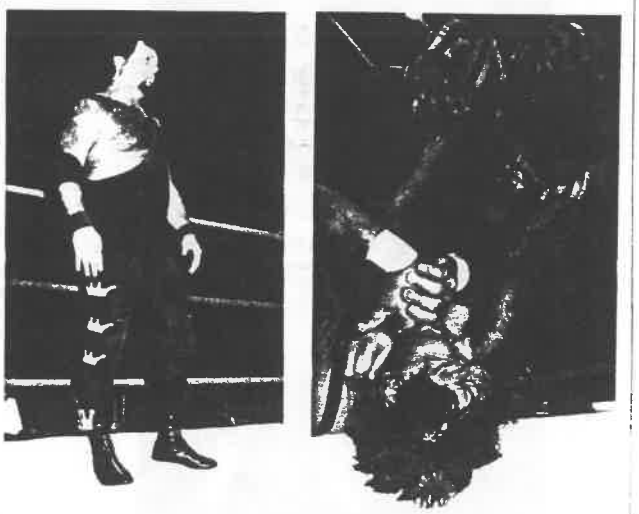
KELLER: WHAT IS DIFFERENT?

BROWN: You are more involved in all of the different things that are going on. If I am the one conducting interviews, then I have to be the one who reacts to what various people are saying. But my fears did not work out. As it turned out, it has not been a major problem .

KELLER: WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE MOMENTS THAT STAND OUT THE MOST FROM OVER TWENTY YEARS IN THE WMCT STUDIOS?

BROWN: Oh, goodness. One, there was a big guy here named Jackie Fargo for many years, and I suppose one of the biggest shocks ever was when I was sitting in the studio there one day and Jerry Lawler, who at the time was just a punk-kid wrestler, comes in to wrestle Jackie Fargo and everyone just figured it was going to be another one of those where Lawler just gets kicked, that Fargo beats the heck out of him, and Lawler comes in and slaps him in the face and goes on from that point. That was kind of the turning point where Lawler kind of became a kid who had never won a match to where he became the legend that replaced Jackie Fargo. That was somewhere around '70 or '72, somewhere in that neighborhood, but they all run together as you can imagine.

A couple of other things happened. We had Lawler and his partner at the time was a guy named Jim White and his manager, the legendary Sam Bass. They found this big guy in Mississippi named Plowboy Frazier who they hired who turned out to be Uncle Elmer later on in the WWF and now is back and wrestles every now and then as Plowboy. Lawler had sucked him into working for him for basically nothing, then gave him allegedly a diamond ring and all this sort of stuff. Then Jerry Jarrett came out - Jerry and Tojo (Yamamoto) were the hot tag team in this part of the woods at the time - and took a hammer and tapped that little diamond and it just disintegrated into powder right there in the studio.



JERRY LAWLER (WK) JERRY LAWLER chokes Wahoo McDaniel (WK)

There was one time, maybe '75 or '76, when the support structure of the entire ring collapsed about two minutes into the television show, and Lance and I had to just talk for most of ninety minutes while they rebuilt the ring. That was the toughest hour-and-a-half we ever went through.

KELLER: WHAT IS YOUR MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT DURING THE LIVE SHOWS?

BROWN: Fortunately, knock wood, I haven't had any major ones personally. I suppose I've been embarrassed for other people for some things that have happened. The time somebody knocked Tommy Rich's mother down. I don't remember who did that. That was kind of embarrassing. As far as personal things, so far I've been kind of lucky.

KELLER: WHAT HAS BEEN THE ERA, THE PERIOD, THE FEUD, THAT HAS LIT YOUR FIRE AND MADE YOU MOST EXCITED?

BROWN: No doubt about it, back in the mid-to-late-seventies, '77 to '79, somewhere in that time frame. Around here, this was one of the wrestling capitals of the world. People came from all over. We were selling out the Mid-South Coliseum regularly in warm weather months, especially. Putting 11,000 people in there every week and turning away two or three thousand. And people like Hulk Hogan, he was here, Paul Orndorff, all those guys were going through here. Hogan's "brother" wrestled here, too, Eddie Boulder.

KELLER: MY FAVORITE WAS THE LAWLER-IDOL-RICH-DANGEROUSLY FEUD FROM A FEW YEARS AGO. DOES THAT STAND OUT IN YOUR MIND?

BROWN: I remember that, for some reason that does not stick as well as the others. I guess things like Handsome Jimmy Valiant breaking the guitar over Lawler's back. That sort of thing I remember. One of the real highlights, I was at the Coliseum the night Lawler won the AWA Title from Hennig. That was a real high moment, I must say.

KELLER: DO YOU THINK MEMPHIS WRESTLING WILL EVER REACH AS EMOTIONAL A MOMENT AS THE NIGHT LAWLER FINALLY WON THE WORLD TITLE? DO YOU THINK THAT WAS THE PEAK OF LAWLER'S CAREER?

BROWN: Yes. I'm not sure if something will come along to repeat that, but up until now I think in my mind the three biggest times in Lawler's career: One, the time he beat Jackie Fargo for the first time. The second time was the time he actually, technically, beat Nick Bockwinkel and lost the belt on a technicality. Then, of course, beating Hennig. He had gone for the belt so many times, AWA and before that the NWA belt when they were based in St. Louis, and finally he got it.

KELLER: HAVE YOU EVER BEEN OFFERED OR THOUGHT OF SEEKING A POSITION WITH ANOTHER PROMOTION OR HAS WEATHER ALWAYS BEEN TOP PRIORITY?

BROWN: Weather has always been my thing. (Another position) is something which I've just never sought. I don't know if I ever would or not.

KELLER: WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON RANDY SAVAGE WHO YOU WORKED WITH EARLIER IN YOUR CAREER?

BROWN: At first when I bumped into Randy Savage, I really didn't like working with him. I thought he was kind of a loose cannon-type individual. But in recent years, while Randy is still capable of creating mayhem, he would be easier to work with today. He was in the last few months that he was around here than the first few months.

"MACHO MAN" RANDY SAVAGE (WK)

KELLER: DO YOU WATCH WRESTLING OTHER THAN MEMPHIS?

BROWN: I don't watch a lot of it, but I do watch other wrestling. I will occasionally watch NWA wrestling, and I watch the WWF nighttime show with Gorilla and Bobby Heenan.

KELLER: OVER THE YEARS, WHAT ANNOUNCER HAVE YOU ADMIRED OR BASED PART OF YOUR STYLE ON?

BROWN: I'm not sure I really tried to base my style on anybody. I think one thing in broadcasting I learned is do your own thing and not try to emulate anyone else as far as copying their style goes. Lance Russell, of course, because we've worked together over twenty years and I still think is one of the top two or three wrestling announcers of all time.

Guys like Mean Gene Okerlund; I think Gene is just terrific. Of course, he used to be in the AWA when I first bumped into him. But I've admired his style on the air. I really think Vince McMahon and Jesse the Body make a good team. Jesse the Body was through here as a wrestler. But he's in a situation that I would have never thought it would work, but it does with he and Vince there. Gorilla and Heenan, I think they're good; they are funny.

KELLER: WHO HAVE GIVEN THE BEST AND WORST INTERVIEWS THROUGH THE YEARS IN MEMPHIS?

BROWN: Jerry Lawler has always been the best interview. He's the best person I've ever interviewed. You rarely get a bad interview from Lawler. There are some that are better than others.

Worst interview, I think I'll pass on that. I think there have been fifty of them. But fortunately, nothing that really stands out as the ultimate bad interview.

KELLER: HAVE YOU FOUND IT TO BE A CHALLENGE TO CARRY INEXPERIENCED WRESTLERS THROUGH INTERVIEWS AS LANCE RUSSELL DID SUCCESSFULLY FOR YEARS?

BROWN: It hasn't been too bad. We do have some young wrestlers who come in from time to time. What I try to do is just keep it short, have them say their peace and make whatever points they want to make and then try to just toss a break or get out of it some way rather quickly rather than just stand there and have them continue to repeat themselves.

KELLER: HOW ABOUT THE INTERVIEW CLOSEST TO REACHING LAWLER'S GREATNESS?

BROWN: That's hard to say. As far as entertaining interviews go, Bill Dundee when George Barnes was his partner. When they first came around here I thought they were very entertaining on interviews. Unfortunately, they were saying stuff that most people did not want to hear. But they were saying some entertaining stuff, some really funny stuff.

I remember they had one when Barnes came out one day in a thick Australian accent and insulted everyone in Jonesboro, Arkansas. He told them they should leave the tractors at home and he described underarm deodorant and how they should use it and on and on. Those things have been recycled a million times now, but back then it was kind of fresh and it was really kind of entertaining.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

BROWN: One, stay loose, be able to get out of the way quickly. Two, keep in mind that you are there to describe the action to the people, not to participate in the action. Three, I would say respect the power that all professional wrestlers have. Whether you agree with what they say or not, you have to remember that they can take me out with one punch.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE YOUR STRONGEST AND YOUR WEAKEST POINTS WHEN IT COMES TO ANNOUNCING?

BROWN: Well, I think my strongest point is that I've always been able to see it as a fan rather than a promoter or something like that. That's not a put-down by any means of promoters. It's just that my perspective has always been able to be as a fan. And I think that maybe I've been able to relate to the fans fairly well as a result of that.

My weakest part is probably keeping up with everything that's going on. There's so much wrestling, there's so many federations, there's so many things going on. Even with ours, we now are affiliated with the USWA in Texas. With two different areas, it's really difficult to keep up on what's happening, and do weather, and do commercials, and do all the other stuff I do.

KELLER: HAVE YOU EVER GOTTEN INVOLVED IN THE POLITICS?

BROWN: No, I've always tried to stay out of that. I've always figured that everyone had their own job, and my job was to show up and describe the action to folks on Saturday on television. My job wasn't to promote, not to make matches, not to criticize the promoters, not to criticize the wrestlers except when they break the rules flagrantly, then I think it is my job to point that out.

KELLER: ARE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED WITH HAVING TO EXPLAIN HOW JERRY LAWLER LOSES THE USWA UNIFIED TITLE IN ONE AREA WHILE STILL CARRYING IT WITH HIM IN ANOTHER?

BROWN: I've had people ask me about that and I frankly didn't know about it until somebody told me about it. The only thing I can figure out is that wrestling in the CWA and wrestling in the USWA were still separate. I'm sorry I can't give you a well-defined answer to that. Under the current situation I don't understand how that could logically happen, but then again, anything can happen.

KELLER: DO YOU HAVE ANY CLOSING COMMENTS?

BROWN: Just keep watching, we appreciate it. Lance and I still talk on the phone and get together quite frequently. We've been friends for so many years. And one thing that has amazed both of us is that wherever we go in the country and in some cases hear from people in the Middle East that have seen our show, that the video tape has been passed around or they actually saw it on the air somewhere, folks have just been nice everywhere. It's terrific to hear from folks in Minneapolis and Philadelphia and all around the country that have seen our show and liked it.

It's been very interesting for us. I hope it continues for a while. We're still alive. We're one of the few if not the only live wrestling show left in the country and it gets a little hairy sometimes. It has it s pluses and minuses as it's not as polished as some other shows. I suppose the spontaneity of the whole thing makes it worthwhile. ***

BR

LEE MARSHALL

If you ask real wrestling fans - and by real wrestling fans, I'm talking about those who recognize the skills of a Verne Gagne or a Bruno Sammartino or a Greg Valentine before a promoter made him paint his hair or an Adrian Adonis before they tried to convince the world he was a homosexual or a Curt Hennig who on any given day could kick anybody's ass in that Federation, on any given bad day - you ask any real fan, and they won't mention the WWF...

Lee Marshall has professionally announced for virtually every major professional sport. He now concentrates on pro wrestling. He has worked for the AWA on ESPN and for the WWF, including Wrestlemania II. Lee, on and off the air, does not withhold his feelings on pro wrestling, a sport for which he has great respect and knowledge. In the following "Torch Talk" interview conducted by Wade Keller via telephone on June 21, 1990, Lee discusses his career, the state of pro wrestling, and the way in which professional wrestling is covered journalistically...

WADE KELLER: HOW DID YOU ORIGINALLY GET INVOLVED IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

LEE MARSHALL: I was born into professional wrestling as my grandfather was actually a pro wrestler. I first began announcing when I was in Phoenix, Arizona in 1968 and there was an opportunity for me to do announcing for a territory. I got the call.

KELLER: DID YOU HAVE ANY PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN BROADCASTING AT THAT TIME?

MARSHALL: Oh, yes. I've been involved in broadcasting since I was a sophomore in high school. My main emphasis was on sports announcing. My original training was sort of self-taught. I was a sophomore in high school and I kind of bluffed my way through.

KELLER: WERE YOU A FAN OF PRO WRESTLING GROWING UP?

MARSHALL: Oh yeah, definitely. My favorite of all time would be Freddie Blassie. Coming from this part of the country, Freddie was the end all. When I first started doing broadcasting, some of my favorites were Sputnick Monroe, Cowboy Bob Ellis, Iron Mike DiBiase, people like that.

KELLER: FOR WHAT PROMOTIONS HAVE YOU WORKED?

MARSHALL: A whole lot of local, territorial promotions. As far as national it would be the AWA and the WWF.

KELLER: ARE YOU STILL A BIG FAN OF PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

MARSHALL: I'm still a big fan. I don't think I could do it if I wasn't a fan.

KELLER: YOU ARE CURRENTLY WORKING FOR THE GAGNES. HOW DO YOU LIKE WORKING FOR THEM?

MARSHALL: They're great. They're great. I just like listening to the stories they have to tell.

KELLER: WHO HAVE YOU ENJOYED INTERVIEWING THE MOST?

MARSHALL: Roddy Piper. Absolutely. My relationship with him goes back to when he was eighteen years old. He was just a kid here in Los Angeles. I've known him, let's just say, since we were both a little younger.

KELLER: IS THERE ANYONE WHO YOU HAVE DREADED INTERVIEWING?

MARSHALL: I can't think of anyone that I've dreaded interviewing. Sure, some are more fun than others. Actually, Andre. Because it was always difficult to get him to talk.

KELLER: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CRAZIER MEMORIES INVOLVING YOURSELF AND PRO WRESTLING?

MARSHALL: One particular cage match between Roddy Piper and Paul Orndorff. Roddy beat Paul. I was going right in the ring to do an interview and Orndorff jumped me, threw me into the cage, jumped on me. Roddy wound up pulling him off of me. That was really memorable.

If you saw Wrestlemania II live, as opposed to the tape version in the video stores, you probably saw Terry Funk throw me from the middle of the ring to like the third row. That one was a lot of fun.

There's thousands. None really stand out more than others. It's been fun.

KELLER: HAVE YOU EVER BEEN DOWN ON WRESTLING DUE TO POLITICS OR ITS DIRECTION?

MARSHALL: Yes, watching the deterioration of the sport. I've got a history, I don't just do wrestling. I've been a major league baseball announcer, an NFL announcer, an NBA announcer, one of the magazines said I'm the only legitimate sportscaster in the business. I was on the ABC Network for eight years and covered the Olympics. Now I'm seeing some of the organizations turn wrestling into more of a cartoon show, and yeah, it really bothers me.

KELLER: ON THE IWA SHOWS AND DURING SUPERCLASH III HYPE YOU HAVE SHOWN A BITTERNESS OR SOME DISDAIN FOR THE WWF. ARE THERE LEGITIMATE FEELINGS IN THAT DIRECTION TOWARD THE WWF, MCMAHON, AND HOGAN?

MARSHALL: Me? No. Not to Hogan, really, because I appreciate Hogan for what he is. I appreciate Vince McMahon for what he is.

KELLER: HOW ABOUT THE QUOTE FROM YOU ON THE JUNE 6 IWA SHOW: "I'M JUST IMPORTING SOME VITAL INFORMATION TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT BEEN WRESTLING FANS FOR MORE THAN FIFTEEN MINUTES, THE FANS WHO THINK ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TAKE A LOT OF DRUGS AND PAINT YOUR FACE, DYE YOUR HAIR, PRETEND TO PLAY A MUSICIAL INSTRUMENT."

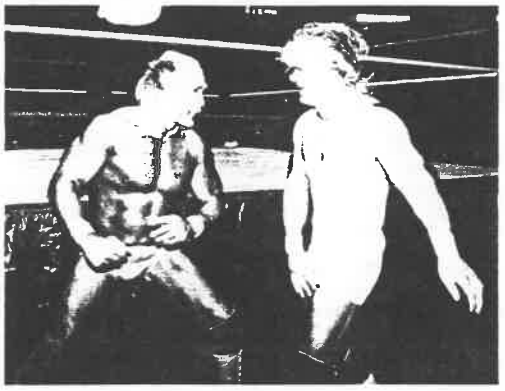
MARSHALL: I'm bitter toward organizations that can take someone who really isn't a wrestler and make them into a star and somehow convince people who really wouldn't know a good wrestler if he walked into the room that he is a star.

KELLER: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MAJOR AND MINOR PROMOTIONS FOR WHICH YOU HAVE WORKED?

MARSHALL: It's really an attitude by the athletes. A lot of them think that once they get into a national promotion like the WWF or the AWA that they really don't have to work that hard anymore. I don't think that's true anymore.

KELLER: WHAT IS YOUR MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

MARSHALL: I used to love to wear this white suit during the summer. Actually I felt it was sort of a trademark thing. It was beautiful. It was sort of the pre-Don Johnson look, sort of a trendsetter. I was going to tape some interviews after a match with Hulk Hogan. He had just had a tremendous match. He was cut up and bleeding. I was just sitting around talking to a couple of the guys getting ready and all of a sudden everybody us just laughing and laughing. Hogan is standing over me deliberately bleeding on my beautiful white suit. To this day I have a clause in my contract that calls for replacement of any clothing that is damaged that way.



HULK HOGAN slaps CURT HENNIG (WK)

KELLER: WHO DO YOU THINK ARE THE BEST WRESTLING INTERVIEWERS AND ANNOUNCERS IN THE SPORT TODAY, YOURSELF INCLUDED?

MARSHALL: I would include myself just because I think I'm honest about it. I would include Jim Ross. Jim takes a lot of heat for being enthusiastic. Well, gee, that's one of the primary things you look for is somebody who is enthusiastic about what they are doing and knowledgable about what they are doing.

Gordon Solie. You always have to think about Gordon just because he's been around longer than anybody and has basically seen at all.

As far as an interviewer, I really like Gene Okerlund. I've always liked Gene. I think he does a really good job. Gene has an understanding of the right questions to ask the right guy.

I tell you who I have no appreciation for are people who would go on the air and insult the intelligence of the people watching by out and out lying about it. For example, when Barry Windham returned to the WWF, for the announce team to go, "Gee, I don't know a whole lot about Barry Windham" when just eighteen months ago he and Mike Rotunda wore their tag team straps, it insults me; it insults the fans. And I think degrades the sport. Hey, you don't need to tell the whole story, but come on, give us all a break here.

KELLER: DO YOU FIND YOURSELF ENJOYING CALLING THE ACTION MORE THAN DOING INTERVIEWS?

MARSHALL: Oh, it really depends. Some matches, quite honestly, they're so easy to do, you could do them in your sleep. You put the heavyweight champion in there with someone who has had three matches in his life, it gets pretty predictable. On the other hand, trying to interview somebody who doesn't speak well is also difficult. There are some doing play-by-play on matches that are just so jazzed about doing them, they're exciting.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN ANNOUNCING?

MARSHALL: My strong points would have to be knowledge of the sport. I do my homework. I know what to expect from each wrestler. I know, for example, that Larry Zbyszko uses a piledriver and I know that Nikita Koloff uses the Russian sickle. I know the moves they use to lead up to them. So I really know what to watch for so I can really be a good eyewitness for the fans. The other thing is I really do think I'm honest. I've been known to say this guy has no business in the ring with this guy and I think the promoters are ripping the people off and doing a disservice to the wrestlers as well.

Probably that's one of my weak points, too, is not being a mouthpiece for every promoter that I've ever worked for. It's probably set me back. I don't have a great deal of patience for nonprofessional people. That is probably my major flaw is I'm not willing to cut anyone a break. That's really too bad, because when we were back in territories, that was where wrestlers and broadcasters went to make mistakes. Well, we don't have that anymore. You don't go to the WWF, the AWA, or the NWA to make mistakes. There's no room for it there. Well, the fact of the matter is is there is not a whole lot of minor league stuff anymore.

KELLER: DO YOU HAVE REGRETS OVER YOUR CAREER AS AN ANNOUNCER?

MARSHALL: I've never had any regrets about becoming a broadcaster. I've said the wrong thing to a promoter which may have held me back; it's happened, but I don't feel it's appropriate to say what it is. I've always kind of felt bad sometimes that I've supported a certain guy and he turns out to be a creep.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES FOR A PRO WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

MARSHALL: Again, know the sport. Know the audience, know what they want. I think the other important quality is you have to treat the sport seriously.

KELLER: DO YOU SEE THE NWA OR ANOTHER PROMOTION TAKING OVER THE WWF'S POSITION AS THE RECOGNIZED NUMBER ONE PROMOTION OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS?

MARSHALL: No.

KELLER: WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO BECOME A SOLID NUMBER TWO?

MARSHALL: If you ask real wrestling fans - and by real wrestling fans, I'm talking about those who recognize the skills of a Verne Gagne or a Bruno Sammartino or a Greg Valentine before a promoter made him paint his hair or an Adrian Adonis before they tried to convince the world he was a homosexual or a Curt Hennig who on any given day could kick anybody's ass in that Federation, on any given bad day - you ask any real fan, and they won't mention the WWF. Other than to say that's where the guys are going to make a lot of money. That, in fact, is the truth, because that is where the most money is being made by wrestlers. But you can't tell me you could take any supposedly top guy in the "Face-Paint Federation" and put him in the ring with Brad Rheingans who has never won a heavyweight championship but is probably the single greatest wrestling technician this sport has ever seen. But if you put Jim Hellwig in the ring with Brad Rheingans, it wouldn't last thirty seconds, thirty seconds! Well, you and I know, nobody wants to see that. That's my great frustration, because I think the fans basically get caught up in the cartoon part of it and lose sight of the true athleticism and the skill these guys have.

If you run down a roster of who the real wrestling stars are, you know most of them are All-Americans, brilliant athletes. Where does an All-American wrestler go when his collegiate career is finished. If he turns professional and refuses to paint his face and be a total goofball. One of these days someone is going to explain what Mike Rotunda is captain of. It used to be he was captain of the varsity wrestling team at Syracuse. I respected him for that, but if he's captain of the "S.S. Norman the Lunatic," I've got a problem with that, Wade.

KELLER: DO YOU THINK IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT A PROMOTION COULD RE-EDUCATE THE FANS AND BE SUCCESSFUL?

MARSHALL: I don't know. I see somebody like a Ric Flair and just want to go to wrestling fans and go, "People, you really think that there is somebody in this sport that is better than this man? There may be guys that may be bigger and there are guys at this point in Ric's career that are younger. But can you honestly, you real wrestling fans, look me in the face and tell me anybody in this sport is better than Ric Flair? Give me a break."

And until fans are willing to recognize that - I've seen people like the Ric Flair's and the Larry Zbyszko's, and the Roddy Piper's - they don't feel they've been in a match until it's gone like thirty minutes. To me, somebody that runs out of the back of the locker room, shakes the ropes, and hits somebody once or twice, and is all winded after that, you can instead give me a Ric Flair anytime that will go thirty, forty-five, an hour, and then take a shower and get ready to do it again the next night.

KELLER: DO YOU THINK MCMAHON COULD HAVE BEEN AS SUCCESSFUL GOING IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION?

MARSHALL: Geez, I don't know. You've got a Bruno Sammartino. I was reading in one of Bill Apter's publications over the weekend how Bob Backlund, somebody on a WWF broadcast, and I think you know who that somebody is, said, "Gee, I can't remember who was the WWF Champion ten years ago." Can you imagine that. I mean, if I was to say that on an AWA broadcast, Verne Gagne would be on me justifiably like white on rice. And for the WWF to give that kind of disrespect to Bob Backlund, a man who was good enough to be champion of this great Federation for six years, and for somebody to sit there with that kind of pomposity and say, "I don't remember who was champion ten years ago" when the man making that comment is the man writing the checks. Come on. Come on. So he did it with the guys like that, the Backlunds and the Sammartinos. He did it with the Superstar Billy Grahams.

KELLER: YOU MENTION GRAHAM, WHICH IMMEDIATELY BRINGS TO MIND STEROIDS IN WRESTLING. OBVIOUSLY STEROIDS ARE A PROBLEM. DO YOU THINK THE STEROID THREATS ARE OVERBLOWN?

MARSHALL: No, steroid threats are not overblown. I'm familiar with bodybuilding. I know what it is to be a bodybuilder and so do a lot of these guys. Bodybuilders only need to look this way once or twice a year. You've got guys trying to look this way 365 days a year; they're gonna die. They're gonna die.

KELLER: DO YOU FEEL USAGE OF STEROIDS ONCE OR TWICE A YEAR, SUCH AS IN BODYBUILDING, IS JUSTIFIABLE?

MARSHALL: I don't know that anyone can really justify it. I don't want to be interpreted that I in any way endorse steroids. I'm also not naive and neither are you. You and I both know how widely used they are. Nothing that either one of us is going to say is going to stop these guys from doing whatever it is they feel they need to do.

KELLER: DO YOU SEE A CHANCE MCMAHON OR OTHER PROMOTERS WILL TRY TO LOWER THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSIQUES IN WRESTLING?

MARSHALL: You know what it's going to take. It's going to take a Lenny Bias, somebody's going to have to die. Superstar Billy Graham, he's going around the country. He and I talked about a month ago. He wanted me to come out with him and go to high schools and colleges and try to educate amateur athletes about the potential damage that you can inflict on yourself by taking steroids.

KELLER: IN YOUR YEARS INVOLVED IN PRO WRESTLING, WHO DO YOU GREATLY RESPECT?

MARSHALL: Roddy Piper. I respect Roddy Piper because he is a man of his word.

Ric Flair. I have never worked for the NWA and the first time that I've really had a chance to speak with Ric Flair, other than watching him on TV, it turned out we were fans of each other. I have a great deal of respect for him. As far as what he is willing to put into the sport. I'm not saying that every time he steps into the ring he does the right thing, but he's there every night and he's willing to do whatever it takes. If it takes sixty minutes, Ric Flair's your boy.

A lot of the old-timers who made it possible. Guys like Red Bastien, who I think is one of the greatest of all-time, probably the first flier, high risk type of guy. I have a great deal of respect for him.

I have a great deal of respect for a couple of guys - they're not six feet tall, they could never take enough drugs to be six feet tall, but to me they're spectacular wrestlers - I'm talking about the Guerrero Brothers.

Verne Gagne. Anyone who can stay in the sport for thirty years has got my respect.

KELLER: THEN WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE TO MANY FORMER EMPLOYEES OF VERNE GAGNE WHO CLAIM VEHEMENTLY THAT HE HAS A VERY DIFFICULT TIME DEALING WITH PEOPLE PROFESSIONALLY?

MARSHALL: Verne's got a very difficult time dealing with people professionally, and I'll tell you what Verne's problem is. Verne Gagne - hear me real carefully on this one, Wade - Verne Gagne's problem is the same one Pete Rose has, and it's not gambling. When Pete Rose was a manager, Pete Rose expected every baseball player to play the game of baseball as hard as he did. Verne Gagne expects every wrestler from the Heavyweight Champion of the World to a guy having his first match to wrestle as hard as he did, and that's not fair. I mean, you can count them on one hand: Gagne, Thesz, Sammartino, Flair, I'll even throw Hogan in there just for the hell of it - I mean these are guys that really, really were technicians. It really is unfair and Verne doesn't realize that. Verne really is kind of a modest guy. I don't how you can be modest being the Heavyweight Champion of the World ten times, but he is. And because of that, I think it is unfair for him to expect another athlete to be willing to work as hard as he did. Nobody works as hard as those guys I mentioned.

I'll throw Hulk Hogan in there. I'll give Hogan his credit. He and I have gotten around a few times because I do not think he can wrestle a lick. I think he has found a way to be a winner. He is just as strong a man as you would ever want to meet, and he has found a way to make that work for him. I think Hulk Hogan would like the world to think that being Heavyweight Champion of the World, for the tenure he had that belt, was easy for him. I know that it wasn't easy for him and for that reason I will always respect him. And it was not easy for him.

KELLER: DO YOU SEE HOGAN WANTING TO CONTINUE IN THIS SPORT INTO THE NINETIES OR RELAX WITH HIS MONEY AND HIS FAMILY?

MARSHALL: I think he might want to relax. You can't relax with your money (laughs). I think he might want to relax with his family.

KELLER: I'M GOING TO RUN DOWN A FEW NAMES AND WOULD LIKE SOME THOUGHTS ON EACH: JERRY LAWLER?

MARSHALL: Tough guy. How Jerry Lawler managed to convince any wrestling fan that he was a fan favorite for as long as he did amazes me. The guy is such a spectacular rulebreaker. Jerry Lawler is the King of Memphis until somebody comes in and tells him he's not and nobody's been able to do it yet.

KELLER: NICK BOCKWINKEL?

MARSHALL: The most underrated wrestler of all-time, of all-time. Brilliant. Again, you want to talk about somebody I have incredible respect for, it's Nick Bockwinkel. In fact, I've got a tape of me doing play-by-play on a match between Nick Bockwinkel and Hulk

NICK BOCKWINKEL and LEE MARSHALL (WK)

Hogan from about 1981 in St. Paul. Oh, man, this tape tells you the history of wrestling, right there. That is that, number one, Nick Bockwinkel is one of the greatest champions of all-time and that, number two, Hulk Hogan cannot be denied eventually.

KELLER: KERRY VON ERICH?

MARSHALL: The kid that can never win the big one. Kerry's lucky to be alive. Kerry deserves a great deal of respect to overcome the adversities of an automobile accident that damn near killed him and then the tragedy of his own life and the fact that he is not only able, but willing to continue his career is really a testimony.

KELLER: HAVE YOU EVER MET VINCE MCMAHON?

MARSHALL: Oh, yes. I think he is an incredibly shrewd businessman. You're talking about a man who was raised in the sport.

KELLER: LARRY ZBYSZKO?

MARSHALL: He really is what he says he is. He really did push Bruno Sammartino to a point where he had to get out of the sport. I think those were probably the most grueling matches Sammartino had at that point in his career. I think Larry pushed him to the wall, to the absolute limit. It was really a changing of the guard at that point. The guy's an incredible athlete and I don't think anyone psyches an opponent as well as Zbyszko?

KELLER: YOUR BROADCAST PARTNER, RALPH STRANGIS?

MARSHALL: Incredible enthusiasm. Really anxious to learn anything he can possibly learn.

KELLER: GREG GAGNE?

MARSHALL: I feel badly for Greg that his career ended the way it did (Kokina splashing his leg at ringside). That's not the way it should have ended. I don't know how it should have ended. Maybe it should have ended with him having been defeated. Greg Gagne, who had the great fortune of being Verne Gagne's son and the misfortune of having to fight in his father's shadow at least deserved the opportunity to see his career end in the middle of the ring.

KELLER: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WAY THE MEDIA COVERS WRESTLING, ENTERTAINMENT SECTION VERSUS THE SPORTS SECTION?

MARSHALL: Gee, I don't know. Let's just say I think it should be covered. I think wrestling is entertainment. I think football is entertainment. I think baseball is entertainment. I think they all fall under the umbrella of sports. As long as there are people who spend money they earned on the job to buy a ticket to take their family out, then to me really, Wade, it is no less than going to the movies or going to the theatrical shows. Your going out to be entertained.

KELLER: THERE ARE TWO ENDS OF THE SPECTRUM IN WHICH WRESTLING IS COVERED. BILL APTER'S STYLE AND DAVE MELTER'S STYLE. WHICH DIRECTION DO YOU THINK IS MORE APPROPRIATE FOR PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

MARSHALL: They should both coexist. Bill Apter's publications are not always right and people think that Meltzer's got the inside line on everything. He's got the inside line on a lot of stuff, but he's not always right, either.

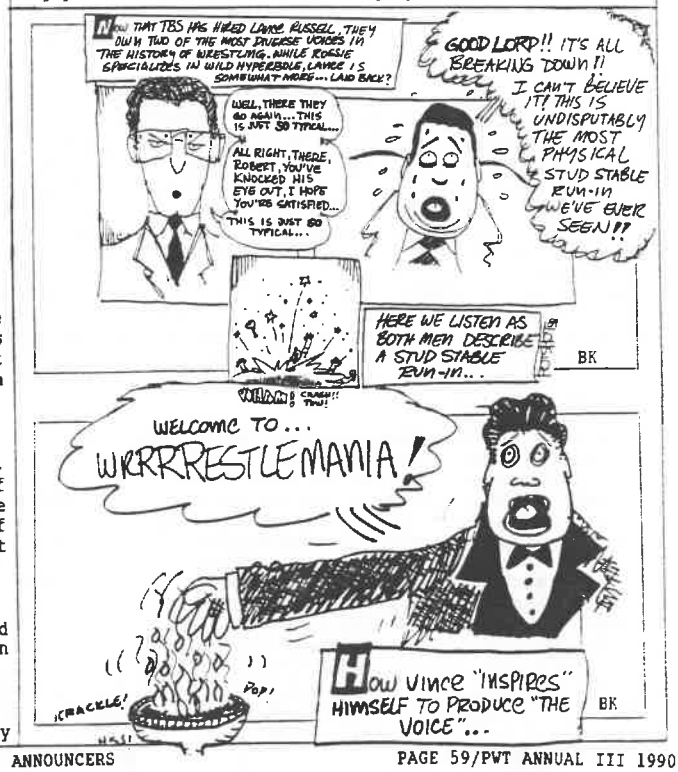
Meltzer is capitalizing on the illusion that he's got the information that nobody else has. Believe me, Wade, Bill Apter's got the same information and probably faster than Meltzer. He just chooses not to use it that way.

Now, on the other hand, my friend Bill Apter, he's got to do what makes money for him. We've had discussions on who is and who isn't a great wrestler, but he also knows whose picture has got to be on the cover of the magazines. That's what sells it, the front cover.

I think that they should coexist. They should live and be well.

KELLER: ANY OTHER COMMENTS ON SUBJECTS THAT WERE NOT COVERED ALREADY?

MARSHALL: I think it's been pretty complete. I've enjoyed it and it's been my pleasure, Wade. ***


NOW THAT TBS HAS HIRED LANCE RUSSELL, THEY OWN TWO OF THE MOST DIVERSE VOICES IN THE HISTORY OF WRESTLING. WHILE ROSSIE SPECIALIZES IN WILD HYPERBOLE, LANCE IS SOMEWHAT MORE... LAID BACK?
WELL, THERE THEY GO AGAIN... THIS IS JUST SO TYPICAL...
BK
ALL RIGHT, THERE, ROBERT, YOU'VE KNOCKED HIS EYE OUT, I HOPE YOU'RE SATISFIED...
THIS IS JUST SO TYPICAL...
GOOD LORD!! IT'S ALL BREAKING DOWN!!
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! THIS IS UNDISPUTABLY THE MOST PHYSICAL STUD STABLE RUN-IN WE'VE EVER SEEN!!
HERE WE LISTEN AS BOTH MEN DESCRIBE A STUD STABLE RUN-IN...
BK
WHAM!
CRASH!!
THUD!
WELCOME TO...
WRRRRESTLEMANIA!
HOW VINCE "INSPIRES" HIMSELF TO PRODUCE "THE VOICE"...
BK
CRACKLE!
POP!

CRAIG JOHNSON

The first review I ever saw of my work called me a combination of Hugo Savinovich and Vince McMahon, whatever that means. I hope that was a compliment, I don't know.

Craig Johnson debuted as host of USWA wrestling in late May. He is replacing Marc Lowrance who had become a familiar host since World Class was in its heyday. In the following "Torch Talk" interview conducted via phone by Wade Keller on June 12, 1990 Craig kicks up his feet in his Andrews Entertainment office in Dallas, TX and discusses his thoughts on the USWA and details some of his already interesting experiences dealing with pro wrestling.

WADE KELLER: WHAT WAS YOUR BROADCASTING BACKGROUND BEFORE BECOMING HOST OF THE USWA?

CRAIG JOHNSON: I've been in broadcasting since 1981 doing High School football and College Basketball on the East Coast. I went to school at SMU and have been a professional broadcaster since.

KELLER: HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN PRO WRESTLING?

JOHNSON: When I was going to college in Dallas, I worked for the company that used to produce World Class Wrestling. I knew about the business from there. Knowing about the wrestling business and also having an announcing background, when Marc Lowrance decided that he wanted to become a full-time preacher, they called me and said, "John, would you be willing to do it." I said, "Sure." Thus Craig Johnson appeared on USWA wrestling.

KELLER: WHAT HAS SURPRISED YOU MOST ABOUT BEING A WRESTLING BROADCASTER AFTER JUST A FEW WEEKS IN THE POSITION?

JOHNSON: There really has not been anything that surprised me since I've been a wrestling fan all my life. I think it's the fact that I've watched these wrestlers as a fan for so long, it seems as if I know them, that getting to interview them, I feel I'm an extension of the fans getting an interview.

Chris Adams and I have gotten together and he's helped me with some of the terms and I'm learning more every week. I'm not Gordon Solie and I'm not the coach out of Florida. I'm used to calling jump shots and free throws.

KELLER: WHILE GROWING UP WHO WERE YOUR FAVORITES?

JOHNSON: I was here during the world famous Freebird-Von Erich feud...

KELLER: DID YOU CHEER FOR THE FREEBIRDS OR VON ERICHS?

JOHNSON: In all honesty, I have to say it was a little bit of both. The Freebirds did some stuff I didn't like, but I don't think there was a better combination of wrestlers than The Freebirds and the Von Erichs. When I saw the first "Badstreet Match" at Texas Stadium when Fritz had to come out of retirement the day that Kerry won the World Title, I was sitting there. If nothing else got me hooked in this sport, being part of those 45,000 did.

KELLER: NOW WHICH WRESTLERS DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

JOHNSON: From a broadcasting standpoint I like "Superstar" Dundee's matches. He's fun to call a match because he's quite extravagant in the ring. We've got a heck of a feud going on between Matt Borne and Kerry Von Erich. They just had a match last week where they put Percy Pringle, my former broadcast partner, in a sling above the ring because he slammed the cage door on Kerry's head last week.

John Tatum is always fun to interview. John Tatum was all heart-broken about losing Tesa. I told John, "I can sympathize with ya', I've had relationships go awry before and I feel sorry for ya." And what's the first thing he says, "I can understand why a woman would leave you." So these guys surprise you.

KELLER: DO YOU WATCH OTHER WRESTLING BESIDES THE USWA?

JOHNSON: I watch the NWA, WWF. As far as announcers that I look towards and think are pretty good - I'll put it in terms of the old-timers and the new breed. I always thought Gordon Solie and Lance Russell were incredible to listen to. Marc Lowrance - I could never fill his shoes here because he was so popular here for so long. As a matter of fact, I never use the word "replace" Marc Lowrance. As far as the guys I most admire in the business, probably Jim Ross and Tony Schiavone.

I try to put as much intensity into the match as I can and I think the person I come close to as far as that is concerned is Jim Ross. If you watch a match and want intensity, I would hope you would watch a match I'm describing or a match Jim Ross is describing. That gets me into it. I don't like a very technical play-by-play; I like somebody that's going to get me off the side of my chair saying, "My lord this is a good match."

KELLER: ARE THERE SOME ANNOUNCERS THAT YOU INTENTIONALLY DON'T EMULATE?

JOHNSON: The first review I ever saw of my work called me a combination of Hugo Savinovich and Vince McMahon, whatever that means. I hope that was a compliment, I don't know. There isn't anyone in particular, but my biggest pet peeve about any wrestling announcers is when they totally ignore the action in the ring to promote an upcoming event. USWA Challenge I am so proud of, as our show is main events, and that's the joy of doing this show. It's not a one-hour commercial. On Saturdays, we have a show that we do only for inner-Dallas called "Championship Sports." I promote a little bit during the match, but for the most part, I keep to the event. There's plenty of time after the matches to interview the guys and talk about the event. I kind of think of it, if you're talking to somebody who is watching a basketball game and you talk about how the Detroit Pistons are a bunch of "Bad Boys" and Joe Dumars goes up and does an incredible slam dunk, you've done an injustice to your viewer. Even though they've seen it, you've done an injustice to your viewer.

KELLER: WHAT IS YOUR TYPICAL WORK WEEK FOR THE USWA?

JOHNSON: Every-other Friday we tape at the Sportatorium. Every Saturday Morning we tape for our Saturday night local show. On the nights we're not taping at the Sportatorium, I'm still the ring announcer. As far as outside events, I'm so new they haven't asked for my services at the arenas when they do other spot shows. I also help in the syndication through Andrews Entertainment.

KELLER: WHAT IS ANDREWS ENTERTAINMENT?

JOHNSON: Andrews Entertainment is a television production company. They produce the USWA show and they're also involved in the production of the show called "Tough Tracks" which is a monster truck show and the production of the "World Roller Federation." Those are the three big shows that come out of here and I help with the syndication.

KELLER: DO YOU FORESEE WRESTLING ANNOUNCING AS YOUR CAREER AND DO YOU HAVE GOALS TO MOVE TO OTHER AREAS TO ANNOUNCE?

JOHNSON: I haven't looked that far ahead, to be quite honest. This happened very quickly. I've been doing college basketball on the East Coast. They called me as I was in the middle of an audition with another broadcast group, just a regular television group, not a sports channel. That group didn't have any openings for me. They thought I was qualified, but they didn't have any openings. I was quite literally in the middle of saying, "What am I going to do to get me to basketball season."

I called Max Andrews, who is with Andrews Entertainment. I asked what was up and he said, "I've got news for you. Marc Lowrance is leaving us to devote full time to his ministry so would you be interested in coming down to do an audition. So on my birthday I came down and did two national shows and one local show. I got through the first one and they said, "Don't worry, you passed the audition. So it worked out that my personality and what they were looking for happened to mesh. So, when you ask if I have thought about this being my career, I couldn't answer that because I'm still so new and this is just so sudden.

KELLER: WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT OF YOUR FIRST FEW WEEKS?

JOHNSON: Other than Gary Young calling me "Jethro" and cracking up on the air? That's the only time I've actually lost my composure on the air and luckily I was off-screen when I started laughing out loud.

This cage match that we had over the weekend between Kerry Von Erich and Matt Borne, it was such an incredible match. Originally, the television table, because it was a cage that surrounded the ring rather than on the ring, was inside the cage.

I ended up doing the broadcasting looking through the cage using the floor director's headset which wasn't even my regular headset, with an extension microphone, having to look through the cage to do play-by-play. Not knowing the logistics of this, originally our director said, "John, the

(continued on page 65)

CHRIS CRUISE

I guess I was always seen as a Northeastern type of person and as a WWF spy. Sullivan and Flair used to rib me all the time about that, when I know that they were half serious. Flair would come up to me half jokingly and say, "Geez, you gonna' call Vince and tell him about this?"

Chris Cruise joined the National Wrestling Alliance in October of 1989. He left the NWA after a complicated incident before a World Wide Wrestling TV taping April 9th. Since then he has ring announced for independent shows, agreed to be host of upcoming Ladies Professional Wrestling Association shows, and is looking to return to a major federation. In this "Torch Talk" conducted by Wade Keller via phone on June 12, 1990, Chris discusses his days in the NWA and what he sees as his future in wrestling...

KELLER: CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW YOUR TENURE WITH THE NWA CAME TO CONCLUSION?

CRUISE: I was on the road for three weeks before Greenwood, the ninth of April, and hadn't been able to get home to Maine. I was just really tired. Sullivan and I hadn't been getting along and I knew something was wrong with Terry Funk, that something was up. But he didn't show up, so they told me I was going to work with Kevin. He had ragged me before and even that day, so I looked at him, and unfortunately his fiance and his daughter were there, I said, "Kevin, I just don't like you and I'm not going to do it." I looked at Tony Shiavone, his first day on the job, the poor guy, and I said, "You do it." He was going to do it the next week anyway. And I just walked away.

Lance Russell came over to me after that, almost begging, pleading - Gordon Solie as well - because they knew it was the wrong thing to do, that you can't walk out on the show. As I explained to Jim Herd the next morning in a letter - unfortunately he hasn't returned any of the phone calls I've made to him and he refuses to even talk to me - I explained to him that had Schiavone not been there, of course I would have done the show, I would have done it with anybody. I'm a broadcast professional and the show must go on.

KELLER: WHAT CAUSED TERRY FUNK TO NOT SHOW UP FOR THAT TAPING?

CRUISE: I had heard that they were trying to scale back his influence. I think they were afraid of his creativity, to be honest with you, Wade. Instead of being in Greenwood, Mississippi, he was in Jackson. He talked to someone in the office and found out that "Funk's Grill" was not on the format sheets. He figured since "Funk's Grill" was off, to heck with it, he'd just had enough and was disgusted. The explanation was, from Jim Ross anyway, was that he just forgot to put him on that week. In fact, he even called me up to explain it, this was after I left the NWA, or was fired, or quit, or whatever the hell happened, and Ross called to explain it. But in place of the "Funk's Grill" were other things so somebody must have known what in the heck they were doing, some behind-the-back power play. He just had enough. He's a very proud man and he saw all these things going wrong, that they were shooting themselves in the foot constantly, and at some point he just didn't care anymore.

TERRY FUNK PROTESTS TO TOMMY YOUNG

KELLER: IN RETROSPECT, WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY KNOWING WHAT YOU KNOW NOW?

CRUISE: Very much so. I would have done the show. Because I was literally sick and tired from being on the road for three weeks, I just wanted to go home. I probably shouldn't have taken the ring announcing job, even though I loved it. I just didn't realize the time commitment and how much the road just beats down on ya'. And I wasn't even working in the ring. I had so much respect for the wrestlers who were able to travel and still work in the ring. But, yeah, I would have done it differently.

I will tell you that when the producers of the show, that's Tony (Schiavone), Keith Mitchell, and Craig Leathers, when I flat out refused to work with Kevin, they came back to me and said, "We'll work it out. You don't have to work with Kevin. We'll take him off the show." And I said - and this hasn't come out before - "No, out of respect for Kevin as a wrestler, I'm not going to do that. No announcer should win over a wrestler.

Yeah, I would have done it differently. I had a lot to learn from Kevin. One thing you can say about Kevin, you may not like him as a color analyst, but he gets over the marriages and angles and the feuds as well as anybody does. I remember when he did a couple of shows of World Championship Wrestling with Jim Ross there were comments about how the show was terrible, and the only good thing was how Kevin got over the feuds so sucinctly.

I miss terribly the people that were there. I miss being that involved in wrestling. And these guys are really superhuman athletes to me, really heroes, I think, in many ways.

KELLER: WHICH LEADS TO MY NEXT QUESTIONS. LAST NOVEMBER IN LAST TIME YOU DID A "TORCH TALK," YOU SAID, "I LOVE IT SO MUCH, I CAN'T CONCEIVE NOT WORKING FOR THE NWA." WHAT IS IT LIKE NOT WORKING FOR THE NWA?

CRUISE: It didn't hit me until about two or three weeks later because I was so tired, so for a week after that I just slept. It's really that these people that are so important to me, like the other announcers, Bob Caudle, Lance Russell, to some extent, Jim Ross, and Gordon Solie as well. People who I had a lot to learn from as broadcasters and as men. People like Jody Hamilton, to some extent to Gene and Ole Anderson; I always thought I got along very well with The Andersons, and liked the wrestlers.

Now I'm just scrambling to get involved in a dignified way with wrestling, whether that's with Sportschannel New York/New England who I've been talking to about doing a one-hour wrestling show, I've had talks with Joe Pedicino, I've talked with Dennis Coraluzzo, and with Joel Goodhart and I've done some ring announcing. I've agreed to join the LPWA as their primary host of their regional sportschannel shows. I had an offer from Rob Russen's IWA to be on the Sportschannel.

And I recently wrote a letter to Jim Herd, and I tell ya', I was very disappointed when he flat out refused to return my phone calls and he wouldn't even take my calls. I understand he was very upset and other people were still very upset. I guess I was always seen as a Northeastern type of person and as a WWF spy. Sullivan and Flair used to rib me all the time about that, when I know that they were half serious. Flair would come up to me half jokingly and say, "Geez, you gonna' call Vince and tell him about this?" Because I had worked with the WWF before. In many ways I felt kind of out of my element, because I didn't even know the NWA existed until a few years ago with the advent of cable television.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE YOUR STRONGEST AND WEAKEST ANNOUNCING SKILLS NOW THAT YOU HAVE DONE IT FULL TIME?

CRUISE: My weakness, I guess was, the same as when I

CRUISE: I always thought I had some sense of him as a person, but how ridiculous. Here's a guy who's survived in this sport for nearly twenty years on top, and you don't get that way being a nice guy. Very contradictory. He could be the nicest, sweetest guy and the next thing you know he is(creating a scene) in a bar. Always fun to be around, never boring. He very kindly accepted me, and invited me to sit at his table in bars. The next minute in arenas he would turn on you. Really, a kind of scary personality.

KELLER: KEVIN SULLIVAN?

CRUISE: I never knew Kevin that much either. We initially had some problems and then we got to the point where we talked regularly, constantly about a number of things.He and I are from the same part of the country and he had wanted to buy some property in Maine. I really like Nancy, and I like Kevin, too. There's that Boston bad boy bully type of aspect to Kevin. I distrust short people and fat people, and I think for good reason. And Kevin had that Napoleonic complex. He never was the star he should have been. He was right when he said he resented people like me coming into the business after having read the sheets. You know, here's a guy who's bled around the country like a stuck pig, he has taken the bumps. In twenty years he will be suffering for this sport, and I haven't suffered at all. So I understand him completely. He's kind of the bully-type and he loves to gang up on you with other people. I think you're seeing that type of behavior catch up to Kevin. He's not too high on the card.

KELLER: GORDON SOLIE?

CRUISE: He has every reason to be angry, mean, and bitter, and he's not. I think that there are some people that think Gordon should be on more and others that think he should be on less.

Gordon is not the type of announcer that I grew up with. I grew up with Vince McMahon. Like I said before, he's still my role model, but I don't think he calls the holds so much anymore. But McMahon used to be great. I really, really liked him. Friends of mine who see me on tape say I sound just like McMahon, and believe it or not I do take that as a compliment.

I just don't know about Gordon. He calls himself a utility person. He realizes he's not going to be the number one announcer anymore. But I still think there's a role for him. I know he and Ole had some clashes back in the old days, so I don't know how that bodes for him at this point. It's as ridiculous as letting Walter Cronkite go on CBS. They should have him in the same role as they have John Chancellor now, as kind of a commentator. There's room for Gordon if they want to make it and Gordon is very receptive for that. Just out of respect for what he's done in this business, I personally like and respect him as well as professionally like and respect him.

KELLER: LANCE RUSSELL?

CRUISE: I think, frankly, he's the one I miss the most. He and I travelled together extensively and literally many, many hours of talking. I am estranged from my family, I have not seen them for two years, my choice more than theirs, and had a very distant father. Lance very quickly became, and he may be surprised to hear this because I'm not good at expressing my emotions, an important person in my life and very much of a father figure. We would talk for hours and hours about the most intimate details and I think that my life, and this may sound goofy and syrupy, had I still been around him, I think I would be a better man than I am now. I know that's a lot to say, but he's been through a lot, he's learned a lot, and he's willing to spend time with a young man and pass that on. Strangely enough, that has been the worst part about leaving the NWA, not being around Lance anymore. It came very quickly upon us and I respected him tremendously and I think he sensed that.

KELLER: BOB CAUDLE?

CRUISE: I think, as I said back in November's "Torch Talk," he is extremely underrated. When push comes to shove and they need a reliable guy for the Clashes, who do they get? Bob Caudle. I think that has to be considered. As a person he's the kindest, sweetest human being. So, again, you can't sell this guy short. If you listen to him, he's always in "Lines of the Week." This guy really knows what he's talking about. He's been doing it almost thirty years. He doesn't look like a movie star, but he knows his stuff. I think for a long time people have underrated him and they real shouldn't.

KELLER: WHO DO YOU THINK ARE THE BEST ANNOUNCERS IN THE GAME RIGHT NOW?

CRUISE: Vince McMahon. The obvious answer is Jim Ross. I really think Lance and Bob are underrated. I think for the role that they play, nobody can do it like Lance and Bob.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME OF THE MISTAKES MADE IN THE NWA WHILE YOU WERE THERE?

CRUISE: There would be feuds started and no finish to them. Constant run-ins. Overexposure of their wrestlers. Certainly too much TV time. Nobody really had a sense of what was going on, who was in charge. Is it the booker, is it Jim Ross, is it the production crew, is it Jim Herd, is it Ted Turner, is it Jack Petrick? I mean who's running things here. There's also no discipline.

I believe in the principles of pleasure and pain. People do things for the avoidance of pain or the gathering of pleasure. If there's no pain involved in doing a no-show, then they'll do it, especially wrestlers. I guess there just seemed to be too much TV. But overall, no focus that we are going to make this the best wrestling organization this world has ever known. Vince was absolutely shameless in the promotion of the WWF. He was going to make it the best wrestling organization, the best sports entertainment organization, that was ever known. There was always a sense in the NWA, an inferiority complex. You know what everyone always talked about in the NWA? The WWF. It was constantly what they're doing up there, what Hogan's doing, what Vince is doing. That's all they talked about. Why don't you pay attention to what's going on here. They're great and I'd love to be back with the NWA, it's a great organization filled with superathletes with a great deal of pride in themselves and wanna' have pride in the organization for which they work. It was so easy working there because you could tell the wrestlers really cared.

Yet, I always believed that if you point out something that's wrong, it's incumbent upon you to try to come up with some solutions. And I can't honestly say I know what to do other than to be the dictator. McMahon is the unquestioned ruler of the organization. If you do things wrong, you're going to have to answer to him. It just never seemed there was anyone you needed to answer to in the NWA.

KELLER: DID YOU SENSE UP AND DOWN MORALE WHILE YOU WERE THERE?

CRUISE: Wrestling always, and I figured this just like broadcasters, always are bitching. They have reason for it because they're on the road and they never see their wives. The life in many ways is the shits. The smart guys save up money and buy "Golds Gyms" or something. Frankly, I was surprised morale was as good as it was. I mean you'd see guys who knew that they deserved a push and weren't getting one. I guess that it's better than working nine-to-five in an office job, so they seemed resigned to it. So many of the wrestlers are just a bunch of jocks that never grew up. Just hanging around in the locker room, bitchin' and moanin'. Then again there are other guys that are really smart and don't engage in that kind of bitching and groaning. But most of these guys are in their twenties. They're relatively young guys and they have this kind of weird life they've been thrust into. In addition, they don't know one day if they're going to be getting World Title shots or gonna' be in preliminary matches. I mean, here's this guy, Cactus Jack Manson, one day he's in the six man tags near the top of the card, the next day he was fired or quit. Norman, one day he's like the number two face, the next day he's off TV. Say what you will about the World Wrestling Federation, but once a guy gets a push, he knows the push is going to last more than two weeks.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE DIRECTION OLE ANDERSON IS TAKING THE NWA?

CRUISE: I don't know enough about wrestling to know whether its right or wrong. Gut feeling is it's wrong. But I have never aspired to be a booker. So many people, sheet writers as well as people in the business, think they could do it. I'm not a creative person, Wade. I couldn't come upwith characters.I couldn't come up with marriages, angles, and feuds. All I know is at least there's a direction, and if Ole has done nothing else, he has shown that there needs
to be a single booker with a strong, iron hand able to fine people, fire people, and show if they want a wrestling organization to head into one direction, they need to have one man in charge, one captain of the ship.

But again, gut feeling is it's wrong. But I'm very willing to be proven wrong in that judgement. I think right now, as I said in my previous interview with you, my problem with critics of the NWA is they didn't give them enough time, as Ted Turner had only owned them a year. I think that we were reaching a critical mass, or we have already, and we've seen things just aren't going to get better. There's this inertia set in and that the company has decided that they're not going to compete with Vince McMahon. I think that decision has already been taken. I think it's about time to come down pretty hard on the NWA. I think that Ole should be given more of a chance. He's taken some very strong measures, but the direction he has

went in, that's my lack of knowledge of the NWA.

My strength, I hope, is that I got to know the holds pretty well and called it with enthusiasm. I didn't have to fake any of that stuff. When those guys would do some of those moves, I would go nuts, and so would Terry. I'm sure that I had a lot of other weaknesses and they don't come to mind, and it may seem immodest.

One of the reasons I was so disappointed was that I thought I was doing a good job. In life, generally, people can do a good job in a limited number of things, and that's the way I am. I'm not a good carpenter, I can't fix cars, I can't make things, but I thought that was really my niche in life. When I went in, I thought to myself, "Oh my god, can I do this?" and a couple of months later it was, "You can do this, can't you?" Just a good feeling.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

CRUISE: That he's a fan, number one. Number two, that he's enthusiastic. Number three, I think that he cares about wrestling and that those things show through. While he has to have an ego, obviously, that the most important thing to him is the wrestling and not getting himself over as an announcer.

I think that that may be Jim Ross' weakness. I've always said, Wade, that I have a big ego. Ross, I think, admits it as well. But I have never defined by life through wrestling, broadcasting, whatever; I always had another life. And Jim, I think, tends to want to insert himself into the scheme of things. It's very important for an announcer to be seen as in control. One of Gordon Solie's strengths was that he was always able to frame the story, so to speak, but not become an integral player in the ring. He could be a storyteller without having to play a role in that and he let others shine. I think that Jim, because of his ego, tends to want to outshine other people.

KELLER: WHAT WERE SOME OF THE MORE FUN EXPERIENCES WITH YOU AND TERRY FUNK ON WORLD WIDE WRESTLING?

CRUISE: On the last World Wide, I brought a costume, I was going to be "Tuxedo" Terry Funk. I brought a goatee and bad ear rings. That was a fun experience that never happened. The most fun were the things that happened off the road. We would pretty much drive and beat the living shit out of rental cars and speed down the highway drinking and laughing uproariously, him telling me stories and me just listening.

Some of the other stuff. I think a couple of times when I would interview Flair in the ring. Once Luger came in and Flair grabbed me and put me between the two of them. I was in-between Flair and Luger.

There was one time when Jim Cornette interrupted the beginning of the show and I was kind of ribbing Terry. I said, "Gee, Jim, I really like the "Louisville Slugger" (Cornette's interview segment) and I like the way you "grill" people. Maybe we should have you on World Wide instead of "Funk's Grill." And Terry got that surprised and hurt and angered look all at the same time. I remember that. That was a classic moment. I like that a lot.

But the most fun was when something went wrong with the taping, and one time in particular we had to go back to the studio to voice it over. Well, it was late at night and we were both just tired, just so punch drunk it wasn't funny. We had to voice over this one match and we kept giggling over the whole thing. If the tape still exists, it was the funniest thing.

And another time when we were just testing stuff, we were calling the play-by-play, but we were using swear words and using inside stuff. Like, "Oh my god, Terry, he just potatoed him." And there were other times when Terry would say, "Oh, man, he kicked him in the f*ckin' balls, Crispy, did you see that!" And a guy would give a chop and I'd say, "Gee, Terry, he just chopped the shit out of him!" The whole crew was just in stitches, laughing uproariously. They were really great times.

Some of the great times, frankly, were with women. You know, you go to a bar afterwards, and there'd be these beautiful women, and I'm just an average lookin' guy, but if you're on TV, there's this aura about you, especially with these groupies. And there were some women who loved wrestlers and some who loved announcers. It was great fun.

And the travel, people would stop me in an airport. I'm used to being fairly anonymous, and they'd say, "Are you Crispy?" Even recently, just a week ago in Philadelphia, I must have signed a hundred autographs.

KELLER: DID YOU EVER MIND BEING CALLED "CRISPY CRUISER?"

CRISPY: Terry, from the very beginning, even before he was on TV, always called me Crispy Cruiser. What people don't realize is, and I tell Terry this, I really think that much of me getting over was because of Terry and the "Crispy Cruiser" thing. Because really, I was just kind of a bland, faceless, generic wrestling announcer, and he gave me a personality. I generally don't display a personality because my background is news and you're not supposed to have much of a personality or become bigger than the news story. Especially at CNN where they don't stress news stars, that's my training. So Terry got me over.

I had heard, just jokingly, that I didn't like the Crispy thing, but no, that's not the case. I always loved it. Even now people say "Crispy." I was doing ring announcing in Philadelphia and there were about 1000 people there. These chants of "Crispy, Crispy, Crispy." I never had a nickname growing up, and this works. I had a different name, Brian Doble, and "Bry" just did lend itself to anything.

KELLER: I AM GOING TO RUN DOWN A FEW NAMES AND I WOULD LIKE YOUR THOUGHTS ON EACH PERSON: JIM HERD?

CRUISE: I owe him a lot. If I have any future success in wrestling, it's because Jim Herd had the guts and the good judgement to look at my tape and give me a chance. Terry Funk once told me, never in the history of wrestling that he knows has anybody come from outside of wrestling to take over such a high profile slot, and that's because of Jim Herd.

All I know, is from the outside, you see all these problems that the NWA is supposedly having. But you figure a corporation brings somebody in to run a business and if they don't run it to their satisfaction, they get rid of them. Well, up until now Jim Herd is still there. He's got to be doing something right or he's got to be fooling other people. I think it's sad that Herd hasn't talked to me. I think it's hypocritical for Barry Windham and Tony Gilliam and others to be brought back and him not even consider bringing Cruise back. Like I told him in the letter, what did I do that they didn't do. So it's been distressing.

KELLER: JIM ROSS?

CRUISE: Jim was initially very supportive. There were people that told me he was threatened by me. I find that hard to believe. But he's a very insecure guy. Overweight people tend to be that way. Sometimes he's very nice. A couple of people and I were talking about it, he's the moodiest guy you'd ever want to meet. One time he'll be slappin' you on the back, the next he won't say a word to ya'.

Jim doesn't want to be a wrestling announcer. I mean, he's gonna take it for now, but he's obsessed with Dick Enberg. He would always ask, "Would Dick Enberg do that, Crispy?" or "I want to get a Dick Enberg tie." He wants to be a legitimate sports announcer. That's why he talks about sports all the time. He could probably pull it off. One thing I told him, and I should have told him to his face, I don't want to be a legitimate sports announcer, so get off my back. If you want to do that, Ross, then what you're going to have to do is drop out of wrestling for a couple of years and start back in the local markets with a new look.

He's very good, but sometimes he tends to dominate the thing. But for pure wrestling announcing play-by-play, he's as good as they come. That doesn't mean he's the best ever.

KELLER: OLE ANDERSON?

CRUISE: He and I got along in a weird kind of way. He would call me all kinds of names. I'd put him in a wrestling hold and try to make him submit. Just kind of weird big brother, little brother stuff.

I think he is the consummate survivor and politician He could be very bitter. The first time I met him he said that wrestling should go back to the regions.

KELLER: RIC FLAIR THE WRESTLER?

TAYLOR: It's got to the point where I saw a column, I think in Torch, where it said Ric Flair was overrated. The funny thing about it, in many ways, once you see one Ric Flair match, you've seen them all. The same with Hulk Hogan. Yet, they're never boring. Isn't that contradictory? He uses the same moves, but the guy is just personally fascinating. As a wrestler, people wouldn't leave if they knew Ric Flair was coming up. It sometimes distresses me when he is considered the best worker of all-times. I think maybe he's the best worker of maybe this era. I think sometimes people lay it on too thick, just as I thought the criticism of Jim Herd was too personal, I think that the glorification of Ric Flair is getting a bit much.

KELLER: RIC FLAIR THE BOOKER?

CRUISE: He never took any stuff from anybody and he was in charge. He wasn't able to delegate. He didn't feel comfortable as the boss. There are some people that can, and some people that can't. I don't think I could ever be a manager. I have a hard enough time being a good enough worker and employee. He was very uncomfortable in that role and everybody was very uncomfortable having him in that role. I think it's best that he doesn't continue there.

KELLER: RIC FLAIR THE PERSON?

taken to bring in veterans at the expense of younger guys is questionable. I think he would have satisfied a lot of his critics if he had brought in the veterans and still given the younger guys a push. It's very strange, because the same thing happened with Ric Flair, he brought in those he knew. But that's only natural when you're in charge to bring in people that you know and you trust.

If you're booker of a major wrestling organization, you have to realize the strength of your organization and it's future relies on your young guys. I mean what if somebody like Ole were in charge when Ric Flair first came into the business. I mean he wouldn't have done what he did. Ole's got his neck stretched way out, he's out on a limb, but at least he had the guts to do that. If he finds that it's wrong, I hope he will come back to square one or adjust it. But for now it seems too early to make judgements. But when you see Junkyard Dog, we were talking about the pride wrestlers have in themselves. Obviously not evident in this man. He has let himself go to pot. When you see that, you feel what is possibly going through the booker's mind to use Junkyard Dog, especially to use the racist angle. That's just inconceivable. Even if Ole had only been on the job one day, you'd have a legitimate right to criticize. However, I have heard calls for Ole's resignation and that's just not right.

KELLER: WHERE DO YOU SEE THE NWA IN ONE YEAR AND IN TWO YEARS?

CRUISE: In the same place they are now. I think that regardless of what happens, regardless of the personnel, I don't see the ratings shooting up. There's always the possibility that Ted Turner will sell it. But I think that it's going to settle in for a mediocre second. There is not that enthusiasm and that company push and that "go out and win at all costs" type of mentality that existed for a time when I worked for them in the World Wrestling Federation until they came out clearly on top. That may sound like a criticism, but it's not that bad, there are millions of people that are very satisfied with the NWA. We're talking about the casual fans.

But I must say I've talked to a lot of casual fans over the past month or so that are very distressed at the direction of the NWA. The racist angle really has them screwed up. But the NWA can continue to do things. Sometimes we read too many bulletins, too many sheets that say the NWA is going down the tubes. But basically I think it can stay the way it is now, forever, if it's getting good ratings and it's not losing millions month after month, and I don't think it is.

KELLER: BASED ON YOUR KNOWLEDGE, IF NOT OLE, WHO WOULD YOU HAVE LIKED TO SEE GET THE BOOKING POSITION?

CRUISE: I would have to say Terry Funk. He finally admitted it to me at one point in a drunken stupor. I think he was too proud to ask for the job or I think he would have taken it. I don't know enough about the other candidates. I don't know enough about Bill Watts. The only concern I had about Bill Watts was that he had a viable organization that went down the tubes. From what I heard about Ole is that he drove two promotions into the ground. So it didn't seem like there were a lot of choices out there. Maybe they could have brought in someone from outside. I had heard that Dusty Rhodes was brought in and not allowed to work. A lot of fans tell me the last year with him was bad. But I don't know enough about the sport to say.

KELLER: BESIDES LANCE RUSSELL, WHO DID YOU FIND DURING YOUR STAY THAT YOU REALLY LIKED AS A PERSON?

CRUISE: Tom Zenk, he's obsessed with CNN's Bobby Betista and always wanted to meet him. Jody Hamilton. Gene Anderson and Ole as well. I really grew to like Terry Funk as a person. I realize that he's been in this business a long time and he can be as much of a politician as anybody. Jim Herd was always very straight with me. He wouldn't lie to ya', but there were times he wouldn't say anything to you. I always got along well with Jim Cornette, Bobby Eaton, and Stan Lane. All of the wrestlers were always very nice. There were very few big egos on display, because if those egos got on display, the other guys would be ready to shoot him down. You didn't pull that stunt in the locker room. Everybody was kind of equal. Even Flair was treated pretty much as an equal. People realized he was the champ, and everything. Sometimes they didn't like Luger, but Lex is a funny guy. He was as moody as hell. There were times he was nice to me and times he wouldn't say a word.

I really liked Shane Douglas. Johnny Ace and The Road Warriors were always great. I would always carry around these multiple vitamins, like Flintstones, and Animal would always get on me and steal them from me. He'd grab a handful and swallow them all. Hawk and Animal were always great.

KELLER: IN YOUR STAY, WHO DID YOU NOT LIKE OR NOT GET ALONG WITH?

CRUISE: Sometimes Ross. Ross heard that I had done the interview with you. I got some heat for that. I had made some copies, so I pulled it out and gave it to him. People told me that he passed it around the office to put heat on me.

Sometimes Norman would get on my case. I was told he was bitter about other things, and he'd take it out on me. That's how you know if someone's a coward if he picks on somebody smaller than him.

NORMAN THE LUNATIC

KELLER: SINCE YOUR DEPARTURE, HAVE YOU CONSIDERED A RETURN TO THE NWA OR SEEKING A WWF POSITION?

CRUISE: I have actively pursued. I'm not going to be coy, Wade. I let some time go. Then I called Tony Schiavone and I called Jim Ross. On two separate occasions we worked a deal for me to do the Power Hour or the event center, the Shawn Mooney type of thing. They presented it to Herd and Herd nixed it. They were under the impression that I'm going to have to wait a couple of more months, that at the end of the summer I will be employable again.

Do I want to work for the World Wrestling Federation? I worked for them briefly five years ago, I grew up with the World Wrestling Federation, I've called and I've sent a tape and resume. I have heard they were doing auditions. Word I got is they don't want anyone connected with wrestling because they want to be seen as a sports entertainment organization. But to my knowledge, they have not replaced Schiavone. Both organizations know of my active interest.

KELLER: WHAT ABOUT CNN?

CRUISE: CNN, we had an audition scheduled. I called them to reconfirm. They started asking me questions about wrestling. See, I was always suspicious. I was ecstatic when they scheduled the audition because I figured they'd say, "No, you've been involved in wrestling, your credibility is shot." I thought to myself, "So maybe I'm finally being let back into the sacred temple of news after soiling myself in wrestling." As it turns out, the audition was mysteriously cancelled. They didn't even have the courtesy to explain, they just said they were going to have to reschedule it. But it's painfully clear that they were under the impression that if I was associated with wrestling, I was permanently soiled in their view and not able to enter the sacred temple of news.

KELLER: WHAT ABOUT THE LPWA, LADIES PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING ASSOCIATION?

CRUISE: The LPWA is scheduled. I did receive an offer from the IWA, but the money just wasn't there. It may have been a mistake, because it may turn out to be a major promotion, in which case the money will be there later. In the mean time, I've talked to SportsChannel New England and they want a prototype of a one-hour sportsmagazines show that I proposed, so that may work out.

KELLER: WHAT IS YOUR FONDEST MEMORY IN YOUR DAYS WITH THE NWA?

CRUISE: Halloween Havoc, I think that was my first PPV. I had been accustomed to a family-type crowd at the WWF shows, and I saw these screaming maniacs who were so into wrestling it wasn't funny. I just felt a real surge. I remember talking to Jim Herd, saying, "If we can do this, there's no where to go but up."

A proud moment was when I saw the first couple of tapes, it really hit me that I really could do this job and that I really wanted to do well.

KELLER: WHAT IS THE LEAST FOND MOMENT IN YOUR NWA STAY?

CRUISE: It had to be the day I left. Not the actual leaving of it, but Sullivan and Norman ragging on me for no reason. They must have had a bad day. I'm not a big guy, but I'm not a little guy either and I can take care of myself physically, and I wanted to go and smack them, but I

knew that would be the last time I would ever make a move with my hands and arms in the same place.

There was a time in Miami when we knew Schiavone was coming back and nobody had the courtesy to officially inform me, and I had to learn from guys like you, and that's not despairing of you. That was one moment where I finally confronted Herd and asked him if Schiavone was coming back and Herd said, "Yes." I asked if he was going to host World Wide and Herd said, "Yes." I asked what was my status and Herd said, "I don't know," and walked away. I found out later that what he meant was he didn't know where I was going to be in the NWA, but I am going to be in the NWA. The next day I called the World Wrestling Federation. Ross called and said that after I left the NWA, there was going to be a place for me. Well somebody should have told me there was going to be a place for me.

KELLER: IN THE NOVEMBER TORCH TALK I ASKED IF YOU KNEW WHAT THE NWA'S ATTITUDE WAS TOWARD THE NEWSLETTERS AND YOU DID NOT KNOW YET. NOW DO YOU KNOW?

CRUISE: My background is as a reporter, and I'm always willing to talk to people. I felt I could provide some sort of a bridge between the fans and the wrestlers.

One thing that was made abundantly clear in the NWA, if you respect the fans in any way, you're considered a complete idiot. I think that's the central problem with this whole business. We're all about pleasing the fans, yet if those same fans we're trying to please are pleased and like it, we think they're idiots because they're easily manipulated.

I got tremendous heat for doing the "Torch Talk" last November. Part of it was that I was proud of the thing. I thought it provided some insight into me as a person and somewhat into the little inside I had gained into wrestling. In fact, I was reading it before this interview. I was looking at it as a fan from the outside and thought, "Gee, that's pretty interesting." I think the fans are going to learn a lot about wrestling from the interview I'm doing now and a lot from the interviews with the other announcers.

One time (Jim) Barnett got mad at me for bringing a sheet into the dressing room. What I had brought into the dressing room to show Kevin Sullivan was Pro Wrestling Illustrated Weekly. Kevin said, "What are you doing with that?" I said, "It's only Apter's weekly." And he said, "Well, it's still a sheet." And on Herd's desk was a copy of Pro Wrestling Illustrated Weekly.

For wrestling, these guys think this is the only business that has people looking at them and publishing. Look at Hollywood and Variety and all the stuff that's revealed in them. It's hypocritical to think in a business this big, people wouldn't be covering it. Kevin Sullivan even got to the point, it's ridiculous, the Omni didn't sell very many tickets. He looked at me and said that night, "See, this is what your friends at the sheets are doing to this business." It was like, "Are you crazy." All this McMahon hating has been going on and he's still drawing. It's ridiculous to think, and Ross and Pedicino are in like minds on this, that the sheets can hurt this business. They might hurt individual performers, but to think that they could hurt the overall business is utterly ridiculous. If I'm a wrestling promoter and I'm afraid of Wade Keller, Dave Meltzer, or Steve Beverly, then I need to find a different business.

KELLER: ANY FINAL COMMENTS?

CRUISE: Only that I think it's vital that a person like you or anybody that is doing this, that announcers are an integral part of this business and what you're trying to do is produce a historical record so that ten or fifteen years from now... I mean I would have liked to read an interview like this with Gordon Solie ten or fifteen years ago. I think that all I can do is, in a goofy way, thank you for providing me and the other announcers an opportunity to put into print and not into the broadcast air where nobody ever sees it again, to put into print our thoughts and our feelings about this business that's so important to us and formed such a big part of our lives. I think it's really necessary. I just wish there was more of an organized forum, somewhere between a sheet and an Apter. Right now, the real deal is the sheets. I can only hope that there is a continuation of these type of Annuals. ***

("TORCH TALK: CRAIG JOHNSON" continued from page 60)

TV table is in there. You're going to have to be in the cage." And I said, "No way." And they said that's the only way they could do it. During intermission they finally found a way to get me out with the extension mic. Turns out after the match that Matt Borne beat up on a security officer, he beat up on a wrestler that came down to try to help Kerry, he beat up Kevin, he beat up on Tony Falk, one of the referees. Anyone who happened to be inside the cage (laughs). I went back to the back and counted my blessings. It's something that was quite memorable because I was able to count my blessings.

I'm sure I'll have more memorable moments as time goes on. It's only been five weeks.

KELLER: WHAT IS THE TOUGHEST PART OF BEING A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

JOHNSON: Keeping my voice. Also, not having a partner any more. Percy Pringle worked with me for the first four national shows and my first two local shows. And it was nice to have somebody who's been in the business for a long time to explain what I can't explain. Well, now that all rests on my shoulders. I'm up to the task, but it's the toughest part. Especially on the Saturday show the toughest part is having to talk two hours straight.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES FOR A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

JOHNSON: The ability to communicate succinctly. The ability to communicate the excitement and the importance to every single fan, that would be number one.

Number two is knowledge of the participants. It's amazing to me how, and it happens to all WWF announcers and the NWA to a certain extent, if I knew that a guy has been a champion in another federation, I make no qualms about the fact that Jerry "The King" Lawler and Bill Dundee, who were in a match a few weeks ago, used to be a team and the AWA Tag Team Champions. I don't know what it is about anybody, but I'll talk about that on the air freely while you'll see other announcers not mention that Ronnie Garvin was a NWA World Champion. You know it and I know it, but when he goes to the WWF he's never held anything in his life. Look at Terry Taylor, they not only took away his name and past accomplishments, but they took away his dignity.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK THE USWA IS DOING VERY WELL AND IN WHAT AREAS DO YOU THINK THEY COULD IMPROVE?

JOHNSON: I haven't been along with them so long that I can fairly comment, but they have worked with me and helped me come into this business very smoothly. If you ask me this question in three months I may be able to tell you more. In the upcoming weeks, you will see an incredible transition in the production quality of the show. That they are improving on. There was downtime in the past, but thanks to Video Bob, they are on their way back up.

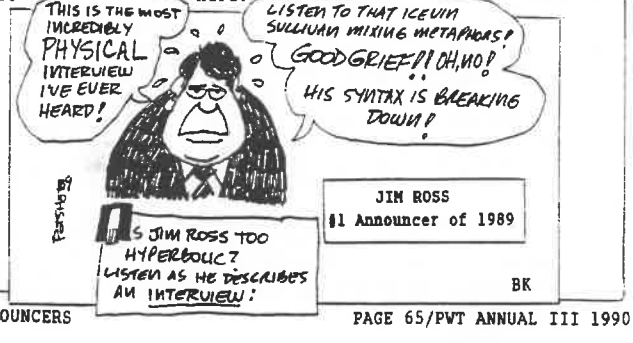
KELLER: HAVE YOU EVER DEALT WITH OWNER OF THE USWA, JERRY JARRETT?

JOHNSON: I was interviewed by Jerry Jarrett before I started the job. He and I get along very well, at least from my side of it. He is a pleasure to work with. He's taught me so much. Where Chris (Adams) has taught me about the various moves, Jerry has been able to teach me about the various history I didn't know about. Although I knew an awful lot, I was never able to see, for instance, CWA wrestling. So he was able to help me immensely in that area.

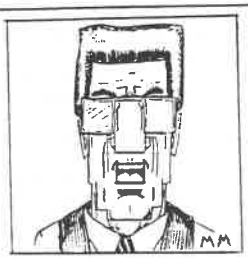
KELLER: ANY FINAL COMMENTS?

JOHNSON: Yes. I remember watching Marc Lowrance when he first did the World Class Championship Wrestling show here on Channel 39. I have the utmost respect for him and can never replace what he did because he is legend down here. I have a lady here who sits in the second row who says, "I wish they'd bring Marc back." But Marc's doin' what he wants to do in life and I say it's wonderful he's able to do that. I'm just happy to have the opportunity to be here. ***

JIM ROSS, EVERY TEXAS WOMAN OVER 300 LBS. HAS SENT LOVE LETTERS TO ME. NOW, SO YOU CAN STOP GIVING OUT MY ADDRESS ANY TIME NOW.
YES, MISTER MURDOCH!
RT


THIS IS THE MOST INCREDIBLY PHYSICAL INTERVIEW I'VE EVER HEARD!
LISTEN TO THAT ICEMAN SULLIVAN MIXING METAPHORS!
GOOD GRIEF!! OH, NO!
HIS SYNTAX IS BREAKING DOWN!
IS JIM ROSS TOO HYPERBOLIC? LISTEN AS HE DESCRIBES AN INTERVIEW!
JIM ROSS
#1 Announcer of 1989
BK

LANCE RUSSELL



Jimmy (Cornette) was kind of a nerd-pest. That's true. That's true. I don't know that I've ever said that to Jimmy's face. I don't like to go around and tell people, "Hey, you were a nerd."

WADE KELLER: HOW AND WHEN DID YOU ORIGINALLY GET INVOLVED IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

LANCE RUSSELL: The "how" part of it was I was doing traditional sports at a station in Jackson, TN, basketball, football, baseball, all of that kind of jazz. The station took on a live wrestling show. They came to me and asked me if I had ever done wrestling. I said no but I've been a wrestling fan for a long time and that I could do it. They had no better candidate, so they said do it. And I did it. That's how I got started.

The "when I got started," in it was, hmmmmmm, I don't know that I've revealed that before, as a matter of fact. I've been in it three years longer than Gordon Solie, let me put it that way. Gordon and I have talked about that.

KELLER: YOU SAY YOU WERE A WRESTLING FAN GROWING UP. WHO WERE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITES?

RUSSELL: Oh my lord. I thought it was the greatest thing I'd ever seen, if I could just remember that guy's name. It was a leaping side mare. He would leap up and his body would be parallel and he would hook the guy's head and take him over while he was in midair. Jumpin Joe Savoldi I believe was the guy's name. There have been so many, I honestly can't remember those names anymore.

When I first started doing (announcing), of course, I started meeting a lot of the guys like Gorgeous George that I had always heard about. Antonio Rocca, what a guy. I'll never forget, I used to do a little ten minute show called "Who's Who In Wrestling" and it was a deal where they would come and I would do an interview with them, but not a sell-interview where you're selling the match. They would cover who they were in town to wrestle, but then I would ask them what their favorite hold is and then I'd let them show me and put their hold on me. The thing about Rocca was, when he finished this show, he went around and thanked every camera man, the director, everybody. He really was a guy who was very aware of people. What an impression he made on me.

KELLER: WHEN DID YOU MOVE FROM JACKSON TO MEMPHIS?

RUSSELL: I left the TV station in Jackson and came to Memphis in 1957 and I came over here as a late show host and then shortly after I came to Memphis, the NBC station, strange thing ultimately the station I ended up here in Memphis (with the NWA), was carrying wrestling. Then they transferred over the ABC station that I was with, HBQ. WMC was the station that originally used to telecast wrestling live. What they would do is telecast the preliminary matches but wouldn't telecast the main event to hook 'em and bring 'em in next week. Then they started a studio show after they originally had that format. That studio show transferred to HBQ and when it came over there is when I started doing wrestling there. There was a period of a few months before I moved to HBQ that I wasn't doing wrestling. Ever since that time I've been doing it here in Memphis.

KELLER: HOW DID YOU GET HOOKED UP WITH DAVE BROWN (SEE "TORCH TALK" ELSEWHERE IN THIS BOOK)?

RUSSELL: Dave and I worked together twenty-one years before I moved to Turner fifteen months ago. Dave was working as a staff radio announcer while he was going to Memphis State University. I had had two or three different guys as my co-host for wrestling. One of the guys that left I replaced him with Dave. What I was trying to do was build a personality there. I was program director of the station at the time and ended being that for seventeen years, as a matter of fact. So we built a personality. Dave was host of the morning "Dialing For Dollars" and then we needed a weather man. It's a whole long story how the news guy was doing the weather, and we were just didlin' in news, but we decided to go after the news market and we needed a weather guy. I talked to Davey and Davey said he didn't know anything about meteorology. But he said he would learn, and brother he did. He's a hard worker. He's just a super guy and I consider him a very good friend. I just asked him then to join up with me on the radio show. We worked for twenty-one years together. That was one of the hardest things about leaving Memphis, breakin' up the team.

I retired from programming after twenty years with RKO. In 1977 the show moved from RKO to WMC. At the time they had a couple of people doing wrestling who knew nothing about wrestling. Dave was there doing weather and Jarrett offered me a deal where I could represent him and set up TV stations for him, plus doing the wrestling on the air. It was strange because here I was working for MC which was always my competition when I was programming. So I did the show on their station twelve years, I guess; that's hard to believe.

KELLER: WHEN YOU GOT STARTED HOSTING THE WRESTLING SHOWS, DID YOU THINK IT WOULD LAST AS LONG AS IT DID?

RUSSELL: No. I promise you, Wade, that every year that went by I would sit down and look at those rating books, and that was my job, I was a programmer, I would look at that and I could not believe it. I would say, "This can't go on." And it just kept getting bigger and bigger.

The real turning point was when I was programming and I was running the show at 2:30 on Saturday afternoons and that's when Nick Gullas and Roy Welch were the promoters in that area. I kept having preemptions because ABC kept having more programming. Originally ABC was a part-time network like FOX is right now. Then as time went on, they got college football. It kept interfering and preempting. And I know you can't establish any kind of a show without consistency in the programs. I looked around and saw Saturday morning and everybody said, "You can't do anything on Saturday morning because no adults watch." I said, "Geez, that's pretty simple. There's no adult programming." So I moved the show to 11:00 on Saturday morning. That's where that time period came from that all these stations around the country are running it in now. When I moved it to 11:00, boy, we found a home.

KELLER: WHAT YEAR DID YOU MOVE IT TO SATURDAY MORNINGS?

RUSSELL: I would say that was around '61 or '62 or '63. Everytime the books would come in, I knew this couldn't go on. This was something phenomenal. I was looking at it as a programmer. Back then I was not a legend in my own mind. I hadn't been doing this that long. It just kept getting better and better and bigger. Then before long we had many books where we would turn on 14 percent of the sets in the area. I'm not talking about 14 percent of the sets that were in use. At 10:30 you would have a sets in use factor, of say, 20 percent. And at 11:00 when wrestling came on the air, sets in use would jump up to 34 percent. We turned on between 8 and 14 percent of the sets in the entire area. Today it still amazes me.

KELLER: TODAY THEY ARE STILL PRETTY SOLID, AREN'T THEY?

RUSSELL: Yeah, I don't really know what they are. We consistently did 23's and 24's ratings - not shares, but ratings. I'm not saying it was because of me, but because of a lot of things, after I left I know that the guys who carry the NWA show here told me the ratings dropped down to an 11, which is the lowest that I had heard. We are doing 8's and 9's on Channel 24 for NWA Pro. I understand it may be up in the 14's, but I'm not sure because I haven't seen the books in a while.

KELLER: WHAT ARE A FEW MOMENTS THAT STAND OUT THE MOST FROM YOUR DAYS ANNOUNCING IN MEMPHIS?

RUSSELL: There's plenty of them. One of the things that I remember, one of the greatest matches I've ever seen and done is when Sam Steamboat and Eddie Graham held the NWA World Tag Titles and we arranged to have, rather than in Florida, they defended their titles in Memphis against Hiro Matsuda and Konji Inoki, who is known as Antonio Inoki now. Inoki and Matsuda were challenging Graham and Steamboat. It was a two-out-of-three falls match. In the first fall, they hurt Graham. Then Sam came back and continued to wrestle by himself rather than forfeit the belts. They beat the hell out of him and the NWA World Titles actually changed hands right there on our television show in an absolutely sensational match. It was tremendous, I have to tell ya'.

There were many outstanding matches involving Jerry Lawler. There were the incidents when Lawler and Sam Bass ripped a suit off of me. That happened twenty years ago and people still ask me about it. And when Jimmy Hart poured a whole bag of flour on my head just before he left for the WWF. That was the greatest thing that ever happened to him, when he left here after being banned from television and went with the WWF. Those are just a couple incidents.

KELLER: WERE YOU AND JERRY LAWLER ONCE INVOLVED IN

STARTING A SEPARATE PROMOTION FROM JERRY JARRETT?

RUSSELL: Lawler and I started to open our own promotion. There was dissatisfaction on Lawler's part and on my part, so Jerry (Lawler) came to me one day over in my den and said, hey, I don't know how you feel about this... and blah, blah, blah, and we got talking and said, let's do it. We got to forming our own promotion. I had lined up a local station to carry it. Most of the wrestlers were coming with us. I don't know what happened from Lawler's end, but he ended up making a deal with Jarrett not to do it. I resigned from Jarrett because I didn't think it was fair to be doing all of this and still work for him. He came down one Saturday and said, "Gee, I can't believe what is happening." Then he said, "Hey, you know it's going to cost me a whole lot of money, so what can we do to avoid this" and all of that. I was content to go ahead with all of the guys and start a new promotion, but Lawler made a deal with him and we cancelled it. Some of the guys were pretty upset and felt bad about that. A lot of them had committed to it and it didn't come off.

KELLER: IS THE SUIT RIPPING OR FLOUR INCIDENT THE MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT FROM DOING THE LIVE SHOWS, OR IS THERE ONE MORE EMBARRASSING?

RUSSELL: I guess, really the most embarrassing moment, and it had nothing to do with that vein, it was the most embarrassing moment when Gorgeous George Junior was ready to leave. He had other things to do or go, of course, he would say it was accidental - I saw him, as a matter of fact, just a couple of years ago; he's working construction up in Nashville; he stopped in the Mid-South Coliseum and we were talking about it - he came right on and there was no tape and he got on there and said, "What a Goddamn Sonofabitch" right on the air. That was very embarrassing for me because I had been a programmer and a very conservative one and so on and when that happened... We had a few little slips over the years, but that was so overt, so I never believed that was anything but premeditated. That was the end of his TV here.

KELLER: DID HE DO IT BECAUSE HE WAS LEAVING OR TO EMBARRASS THE PROMOTION.

RUSSELL: He was leaving and probably wanted to try to get away with it and he wanted to make a name for himself. A lot of guys will do this stuff because it separates them from the other guys. You know what fierce competition, Wade, there is in trying to make it in this business, and these guys are trying to get noticed. They do outrageous things a lot of times. I assume that's why he did it, but I didn't discuss it with him, I was so hacked off at the time. All of that passed as the time went by.

Personally, I assumed that the suit incident or the flour incident were my most embarrassed situations. It wasn't as bad with the suit. It was embarrassing to have the suit ripped right in half on the air, but the flour under the lights and all, I was sweating, and I really looked embarrassing. Jimmy and I laugh about that from time to time.

KELLER: WHAT WAS THE FEUD OR ERA THAT REALLY LIT YOUR FIRE, THAT STANDS OUT AS YOUR FAVORITE?

RUSSELL: It had to be either the Jackie Fargo-Big Al Greene feud which culminated when Jackie insulted Jackie's daddy and his parents and that led to a big cage match and hair thing and Fargo got his hair cut, which was a shock to everybody. It was really first class traumatic. We were selling out the 11,000 seat arena every week.

The other one would be the Dundee-Lawler feud in the past. Their matches, I've seen 'em go against each other twenty-five times over the years and they are just constantly the most intense. Even when they were wrestling as tag team partners, Billy's a very proud kind of guy and Lawler is one of a kind, and there wasn't room for two number ones, and Billy never could admit that Lawler was number one and Lawler obviously wouldn't admit that Dundee was number one. When they were tag team partners they never really got along. I think they could get along better today than they did. So when they started wrestling against each other, up to and including when Dundee's wife agreed to put her hair on the line. Dundee lost and they actually cut her hair, his former wife, actually. Those two guys, I've never seen anything like it. I happened to be in Louisville and I walked down in the dressing room after their match was all over with and I looked at Lawler. Man, blood is coming out of his lip and one eye is about half-closed and blood is trickling down his nose. I said, "God, he beat the hell out of ya, heh?" And he said, "Go take a look at him." And I went over to Dundee and there's blood pouring out of his mouth and he's got one eye closed.

KELLER: DO YOU THINK MEMPHIS WILL EVER REACH THE EMOTIONAL PEAK THAT WAS ATTAINED THE NIGHT LAWLER FINALLY WON A WORLD TITLE, THE AWA TITLE FROM HENNIG, AND HAVE THERE BEEN MORE EMOTIONAL MOMENTS THAN THAT ONE?

RUSSELL: That obviously had to be, because that was the culmination of a lot of years of Lawler trying to get a World Title. It had to be one of the most emotional. I'm not sure it was any more than, let's say, Jackie Fargo when he got his hair cut or when Dundee's wife got her hair cut. But as far as wrestling fans getting involved in a match, that Hennig had to be tops.

To answer your question, I don't see it happening. I don't know. It's a sad fact, you know the situation Wade, they just can't compete with the towns. One of the major things that I recognize about the latter days of Memphis as compared to the NWA, the calibre of the majority of the guys - well, they start out near the top of where Memphis is, not to say they're all as good as Lawler because they just don't come that way. But if you took the top third of the wrestlers here (in the NWA) and the quality is just so much more consistent. I don't know that it could ever happen again. I think that you would have to have a moratorium of TV wrestling where people didn't get to see it. You understand what I'm saying, because the proliferation of it on TV is obviously deadening the senses. If you watched a James Bond movie every week... We used to have an hour and a half of wrestling in Memphis, and now if you have cable, you can watch anywhere from 24 to 27 hours. That's why I don't think it can ever come back to the heights. McMahon has made it into a mammoth industry, no question about it.

KELLER: I AM GOING TO MENTION A FEW NAMES FROM MEMPHIS AND I WOULD LIKE A FEW THOUGHTS ON EACH OF THEM: JERRY LAWLER?

RUSSELL: One of the best I've ever seen. The guy has got one of the greatest mouths wrestling has ever seen. He's very articulate. Jerry is very capable of getting the most emotionally out of a situation, he's very hip to that He used to be one of the most daring wrestlers I've ever seen as far as taking risks and doing stuff when he was younger. But you don't do the same thing at forty that you do at twenty; you will find that out.

KELLER: RANDY SAVAGE?

RUSSELL: Tremendous talent. Here's a guy that you will hear us saying a lot about when we were doing commentary and all, but there are some guys that have pure athletic talent. But some of them don't who are learned professionals and Randy is just a pure athlete, there's no question about it.

MR. PERFECT CURT HENNIG

KELLER: CURT HENNIG?

RUSSELL: Ah, God, now there is a guy that really is the ultimate consummate professional guy. He just could do every facet of wrestling old-style, or the modern-style. I have tremendous admiration for Curt. As long as you're mentioning Curt, let me also throw in, I had the same kind of feeling about Nick Bockwinkel. They both are second generation wrestlers and Bockwinkel was the kind of guy I just thought had tremendous class. He's a very special associate that I've had. Nick and I are not close now. Periodically he'll come through town and call me or I'll call him at home every now and then. Both of them are very similar because they are both professionals.

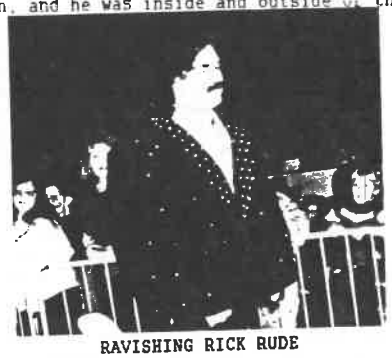
KELLER: JERRY JARRETT?

RUSSELL: Jarrett is one of the smartest promoters that I believe I know. Jarrett probably had a better grasp on the development of storylines in wrestling of anybody that I've ever known. I think he had an amazing grasp of realizing what was needed for intense loyalty and he's a very smart guy.

KELLER: EDDIE MARLIN?

RUSSELL: I consider Eddie a very good friend. He's the

kind of guy when he gives you his word that you could put it in the bank, and that's not true for everybody. He was not the most graceful wrestler that I ever saw, but everybody knew that Eddie was a genuinely tough son-of-a-gun, and he was inside and outside of the ring.



RAVISHING RICK RUDE

KELLER: RICK RUDE?

RUSSELL: Rude was a guy, who, when I first knew Rick, he spent many long hours in the gym to develop that body. He became a better wrestler after he left Memphis. I always admired anybody who had the fortitude to stay in the gym long enough to develop a body like that.

KELLER: JEFF JARRETT?

RUSSELL: Jeff is one of the harder workers that I've seen around of the younger generation. He, of course, sat in the situation where his dad owned the business. It would have been easy, as some others have done, not to work, but Jeff, nobody worked in the gym harder to put on some weight. He was not blessed with being a big guy. He worked as hard as anyone I've ever seen to overcome that. He's a solid athlete, and an excellent basketball player, and I've always admired him for that, because it would have been easier to take the easy way out and rest on his daddy's laurels. I have tremendous respect for Jeff.

KELLER: HOW ABOUT LANNY POFFO?

RUSSELL: (Laughs) That's a strange name to bring up. I liked Lanny very, very much. I thought he was an interesting complex kind of guy to be involved in the wrestling business. His ideas about what would get over, what people would like, were a little different than most people in the wrestling business. Not that there's anything wrong to saying they were different . I think the poetry thing, which he insists on, and I guess it's probably done pretty well with Vince. I honest to god haven't watched him that much. I've seen him as The Genius

THE GENIUS LANNY POFFO

maybe one or two times. Lanny persevered on that poetry thing. He did it here, ya' know, and we featured it, and nobody gave a damn. So maybe now it's better as The Genius. (Laughs) Who in the world would have ever thought of something like that in connection with wrestling. Poetry was just a hobby, but he was obsessed with the idea that it was going to work with people, that it would set him apart in a positive manner from all of the other guys. He may be right, I'm not saying he's wrong, but I find it a little odd.

KELLER: DAVE BROWN?

RUSSELL: A very solid friend. He's the kind of guy that is one of the most conscientious workers I've ever been around, whether it has to do with wrestling or his weatherman stuff. He is the first layman who was ever elected the head of the local meteorological group. That's the respect he had from guys who had meteorological degrees. Dave is a great guy, a great family man, and he's the kind of guy I'm very delighted to call my friend. I would like to work with him anywhere I could in the future. Dave has a very large niche there, with an extensive amount of voice-over and commercial things all over the country. Great all-American guy.

KELLER: THE FABULOUS ONES?

RUSSELL: Oh, gosh, a spectacular team. They were the epitome of modern appeal, they were both good lookin' guys, Lane and Keirn. They both look like athletes. And they both could wrestle. They had that great heart throb appeal to the young women, and maybe not-so-young, I don't know. I don't know of a team that has come along since that time who fits those categories as well as they did. I've seen The Fantastics, and I like Bobby and Roger. There's just so many of them that I like, but I've never seen anyone who had all of the ingredients like they did.

KELLER: THE ROCK & ROLL EXPRESS?

RUSSELL: There's a team that I have a particular soft-spot for. I knew them both before they started wrestling. Paul Morton, Ricky's dad, was the referee in this territory and Gibson wrestled here for a long time. Again, similar to what I said, they could live on it, like a lot of guys they could go half way and they never would have gotten as far. These two worked harder than any two guys when they started. They are really conscientious individuals and I love their work. Crowds seem to, too.

KELLER: ONE OF THE BETTER TEAMS TODAY, THE MIDNIGHT ROCKERS?

RUSSELL: Oh, yeah, what an excellent young team. They really are. They're one of the better tag matches I've seen in recent times. Some of the better matches I've seen in recent times have come out of the WWF with The Rockers and Arn & Tully. That series was short-lived, but man, it was excellent. You are correct, they are the best since The Fabulous Ones outside the NWA.

KELLER: EDDIE GILBERT?

RUSSELL: Eddie is a guy that I've got a lot of admiration for. He learned it the hard way. I've known him since he was a little itty bitty kid. I knew his dad, who worked here for Eddie Marlin for years. Eddie is one of the smarter minds and he's going to find his niche. I just hope his wrestling is not over with. Like Jeff, he was not gifted with size, and he's been accident prone.

KELLER: JACKIE FARGO?

RUSSELL: Jackie Fargo probably knew people better than anyone I have ever known. The closest thing to him would be Lawler who learned everything he knows from Fargo. Jackie just had a sense - today he can walk into a Mid-South Coliseum in Memphis, Tennessee - it won't be full like it was when he was wrestling - and he can walk in there and turn that crowd over by a single gesture. He's great. There's probably more wild behind the scenes Jackie Fargo stories than any other guy I know.

KELLER: MORE THAN RIC FLAIR?

RUSSELL: (laughs) Yeah, maybe, but that would be a toss-up. I would have to give the nod, certainly to Jackie.

KELLER: JIMMY HART?

RUSSELL: I'm glad to see Jimmy doing so well with the WWF. I think Jimmy, if I had to pick one guy, and I've mentioned some guys that have worked hard in this business, if I had to pick one guy, he is the hardest workin' guy in wrestling. I'm sorry that his role in the WWF isn't broader than it is because Jimmy has a lot more talent than people have seen in the WWF. If you have seen his Memphis stuff, which I know you have, you are aware of that. But there's only room for one number one guy (Heenan).

KELLER: JIM CORNETTE?

RUSSELL: Oh, what a mouth on that guy. He and Dangerously, we got them both now. I loved Jimmy from his humble beginning photographing wrestling in Louisville, and he really got a lot of heat from the guys and that's what gave Jarrett the idea that he would be a great manager.

KELLER: HOW DID JIMMY CORNETTE GET HEAT WITH THE GUYS?

RUSSELL: Jimmy was kind of a nerd-pest. That's true. That's true. I don't know that I've ever said that to Jimmy's face. I don't like to go around and tell people, "Hey, you were a nerd." He's changed so much now and he's just a professional. Boy does he understand the business. Great ad-libber.

KELLER: PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY?

RUSSELL: Paul E., what can I say? Here's a guy that's got as good a mind about professional wrestling as there is. I think one of the biggest things about Paul E. that's detrimental to him is his youth. He definitely has a vision for Paul E. Dangerously. I think Paul E. is tremendous. I saw the guy go through a scaffold match that I couldn't believe anybody would climb, that Lawler-Dundee-Rich-Idol thing with Dangerously. Paul E. worked it and I never would have believed it. And they were trying to kill him, too. Paul E., at those times he started, everybody wanted to kill Paul E. He was always getting into trouble.

KELLER: WHY DO YOU THINK JIMMY HART, JIM CORNETTE, AND PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY MADE IT SO BIG, WHILE SO MANY OTHER MANAGERS NEVER MADE IT PAST MEMPHIS? WERE THERE TALENT OR ATTITUDE DIFFERENCES?

RUSSELL: There's definitely a talent difference. It's not that I'm prejudice. There are only a few guys who know the right ingredients, that is to say, they don't go too far overboard or they know when they've gone too far overboard and will tuck their tale in on it a little bit enough to fit. They know when they've got to look bad or good. And Heenan's marvelous at it, there's another one. But there's a lot of guys, there's no point in me naming them, you know who they are, who absolutely do not know what the role is. They either do not have the ability to ad lib and play mind games with people or they go too far overboard and they think being nasty is the secret to it all, and it isn't. There are just a lot of things that go into making up the exception, and those three guys are the exception. It just so happens they touched base here in Memphis.

KELLER: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR WRESTLING HOTLINE SHOW.

RUSSELL: The WCW Profile on Wednesday nights is some of the most revealing stuff you've ever heard. I've told Turner Home Entertainment, what we need to do, it is doing okay but it's not doing what I thought it was when I suggested we do it. It's because I don't think people really realize what is on there. We had a priceless series with The Freebirds. They're in typical Freebirds style. I just started one that will start next week and air for four weeks with Buddy Landell. Landell just tells you stuff you have never heard. I understand (when people say it's so expensive.)

KELLER: WHO WOULD YOU PINPOINT AS GIVING THE MOST ENTERTAINING INTERVIEWS IN ALL YOUR YEARS IN MEMPHIS?

RUSSELL: Lawler. The best.

KELLER: HOW ABOUT NUMBER TWO?

RUSSELL: I tell ya' who came very close to it today and in his last years are Dundee. Dundee started out very difficult. He didn't give good interviews. Jackie Fargo, of course, in his own style was marvelous. Jackie has got to be right in there.

KELLER: WHO LASTED THE LONGEST ON THE SCENE WHO YOU HAD TO LEAD THROUGH INTERVIEWS?

RUSSELL: I tell ya' a guy who you would find it hard to believe, of course Dundee's one of them, but it's hard to believe looking at him today who was absolutely like pulling teeth, was "Honkeytonk Man" Wayne Ferris. Geez, I can recall standing in Louisville, Kentucky, we must have done fourteen takes, twenty takes on an interview trying to get Wayne to come out a little bit.

There have been a lot of guys that I consider really bad interviews but they didn't understand the chemistry that makes a good interview. They thought that if they hollered loud enough, it made it a good interview.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

RUSSELL: One of the things, he's got to know wrestling, he's got to know the holds. That obviously is a requirement, but it goes well beyond that. You need that for any kind of announcing. You've got to know what you're talking about.

Getting past that, at least it has been my belief, you have an understanding of what entertains the wrestling fan because the announcers that consider themselves the attraction or the star are the ones, in my opinion, that are totally missing the boat. One of the requirements is you have to know your place. I'm not putting that in a subservient sense, but to realize that the attraction is the wrestling and the wrestler. You have to understand, I think, what people want. Different announcers have different opinions of what people want to hear. All you have to do is watch some of my work to know I feel that people like for you to talk in a manner in which they understand, and they say, "Yeah, that's right. By gosh, that's what I would tell them." Then you're one of the people, more or less. There are other guys that feel that is not their place, that their place is to give heavy detailed background on wrestlers. What I'm saying, is there's different opinion. Mine is that you need an understanding of the people you are talking to. That's one of the things I love about doing the 900 number across the country. I get a chance, literally, and I mean this, it's not just hogwash, to talk to the wrestling fans. I like to know what's on their mind and I like to know what they're bitching about. I like to know what they're like. If you're an announcer and all you're concerned with is the nuts and the bolts of the affair, I think you're missing a major, major part of the business.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE YOUR STRONGEST AND WEAKEST ANNOUNCING TRAITS?

RUSSELL: I think I probably just touched on them. One is that I probably think like a wrestling fan. I think that's probably my strongest trait.

I think the weakest trait I have is probably my memory. My daddy told me years and years ago, "Don't bother to remember anything you can look up in a file. Keep your mind clear for things you gotta have." It probably takes me a little while to dig up these things. Of course, I have had a few more pass in front of me than most people have.

KELLER: HOW DIFFICULT WAS THE DECISION TO LEAVE MEMPHIS?

RUSSELL: It was very difficult. There were good people to work with down there. Jim Herd was understanding about the fact that Memphis was my home. When I was able to live here and work out of here, that cleared a lot of it. I was sorry to leave working with Dave (Brown). I would have to tell you the wrestling had got to the point where it was not as challenging as it had been, so that helped make it a little bit easier. But it took a lot.

KELLER: DO YOU THINK NOW IT WAS A GOOD DECISION?

RUSSELL: Without a question of a doubt. I wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world. I had never travelled to the extent that I'm travelling right now, and it's something that I have to do. I have always been a family man and I miss my wife and my dog and my home. So it was a hard decision to make. We've kind of gotten used to it now. I would have never gotten the chance to work with a guy like Flair. And while I had worked with Scotty Steiner here (in Memphis), Scotty was one-half of what he is now, that's how far he's come in the year that he's been with the NWA. Just the opportunity to work with guys that are the best in the business and do it on a weekly basis has really been an experience; I've enjoyed it.

KELLER: WHAT IS THE DOWN SIDE?

RUSSELL: I guess probably the travel thing is the downside. In all honesty, and I guess I shouldn't say this, that I don't have as much input in the situation as I used to. I understand my position. They didn't hire to run the thing. I had been in station management for a long time and I had shared my input with the Jarrett-Lawler organization. That's something that was a little difficult for me to get used to, nobody saying "What do you think?"

KELLER: WHAT IS YOUR FONDEST MEMORY FROM YOUR FIRST FIFTEEN MONTHS IN THE NWA?

RUSSELL: I guess probably the fondest memory at the moment, I've really liked working with the (wrestlers), but the guys I've really loved working with have been my colleagues. It's great to see Gordon on a regular basis. Particularly Gordon is working, and I hope it stays that way, on a regular basis on the 900 number on the PPV's and Clashes. Getting to know Bob Caudle, who became a very good friend of mine. Getting to know Jim Ross, I've admired and watched his work. And Tony Schiavone, who I think came along with Georgia Championship Wrestling as fast as anybody.

Crispy, it was a real treat working with Chris (Cruise). He travelled with me. He was my boy. I took over a daddy role (laughs). He was just such a super guy and a fun guy. It's just unfortunate things happened the way it did. I would've given anything in the world... I spent forty-five minutes convincing Chris not to do what he did. There's no question in my mind about it, I've told everyone in the office, I've told him, I've told everybody, he will be back and will be successful at it. One of the biggest things about him is, he knows what he's doing. But what separates him, and I mentioned it to ya' a moment ago, he's a fan. He knows what people think, and he knows what he likes to see as a fan. It's just different. It's nice when somebody likes what they're doing and they're not just doing something because there's a lot of money in it.

KELLER: HOW MUCH LONGER DO YOU SEE YOURSELF ANNOUNCING?

RUSSELL: Golly. When I came down I started to work one year for the NWA. It's hard to believe I'm four, five months into my second year now. As long as I'm still having fun and the Good Lord blesses me with continuing health, I just really don't know. If you would have asked me this last November, I would have said I will be through February when my contract is up, this is going to be the end of it. But now I'm a long way from that. I'm really enjoying what I'm doing. At the present date, I don't have an end date. Now the NWA might have an end date, but I don't have an end date.

KELLER: IF YOU COULD MATCH UP ANY CURRENT NWA WRESTLER IN HIS PRIME AGAINST ANY PAST MEMPHIS WRESTLER IN HIS PRIME, WHAT WOULD THE MATCH BE?

RUSSELL: It would be Flair-Lawler, what else? It's got to be. They were booked to wrestle each other at one time, at the Bash that was going to take place here. My understanding, they ran into some political front office problems. Lawler had some problems with Crockett and Dusty

(continued on page 70)

("TORCH TALK: JIM ROSS" continued from page 51)

times the problems that Doc's had with authorities when he went to Japan one time was a big deal. Fan s really crossed the line, it was bush league when they chanted "Just Say No" at his matches. His forte's not talking. Everybody makes a big deal about how he can't do an interview and how dumb he is. Doc's not a dumb guy. Doc just doesn't articulate and convey his thoughts well. There are a lot of politicians and entertainers, when they're not reading lines, are horrible, but that doesn't mean they're dumb. Doc is gifted athletically, I think he's a natural for wrestling, because I think he can be a big star.

KELLER: JIM CORNETTE?

ROSS: Cornette's the best at what he does in wrestling. He's got a great mind. He's got great talent. He could probably be doing other things like in radio or entertainment. But I think Cornette is very gifted. I think he's probably underutilized as far as his ideas. I think he'd be an asset to any booker a far as brainstorming with him. He is, in my opinion, the best manager in wrestling.

KELLER: PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY?

ROSS: Paul E.'s got a great deal of talent. Paul E. is probably in the top four, five managers in wrestling. Paul E. can learn from Jim Cornette. Now he may not think that. One of Paul E.'s greatest gifts, but also one of his greatest problems, is his own ego. He believes in himself, and that's good, and I think probably on this tour of duty he's a little more receptive to constructive criticism. He has to learn to conform to what management wants and that's tough for a young guy that's enthusiastic and has a lot of confidence. Paul E.'s best years are yet to come and the only thing that will stop him is himself, to be honest with ya'. He's got lots of ability and lots of talent. If he has any downfall, it will be self-induced.

KELLER: WHAT ABOUT YOUR FUTURE?

ROSS: I feel my best days are yet to come. I hope someday that I will gain the notoriety and the tenure of Gordon Solie. I want to be identified as the guy that comes on and works hard, they have fun listening to, and he never really insults my intelligence. The actual product insults some people's intelligence in the position that it's all factual. The product by nature is insulting to some people. I knew when I got into wrestling that I was going to taint my chances of doing anything else. I could do football. I could do football as well as I do wrestling, in my opinion, because I'm a student of the game and an enthusiast.

KELLER: ANY FINAL COMMENTS?

ROSS: I hope we can solve our problems at TBS. We really are in a learning experience in many ways. There are a lot of things we need to do. The fans need to understand who read your publication we are working really hard at getting it done. I wish you good luck on your publication.

[Part One of this interview ran in the July 19th issue of the Torch Weekly newsletter (#78). Part Three, the final excerpt of our 150 minute coversation, will run in a future edition of Torch Weekly where the main subject is the legendary Bill Watts UWF, where Mr. Ross discusses the name change, the expansion, the experience, and the eventual sale of the UWF to the NWA.] ***

("TORCH TALK: LANCE RUSSELL" continued from page 69)

and that, a real vendetta. And Lawler put on some free matches to hurt the Bash.It did hurt, but I don't know if that's the reason they didn't draw anything. But it's a shame that never happened, it would have been a great one.

KELLER: ANY FINAL COMMENTS?

RUSSELL: I've talked all I need to talk, except to say I've enjoyed talking to ya', Wade. ***

("TORCH TALK: GORDON SOLIE" continued on page 47)

KELLER: JIM HERD?

SOLIE: Jim Herd is probably one of the nicest men I've ever met in the sport. He's taken on a very difficult position and I think carrying it out very well.

KELLER: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS FOR A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER?

SOLIE: Obviously knowledge of the sport. You certainly have to be willing to travel. I think to keep yourself as objective as possible in regards to bringing the commentary to the people. I think that has always been a critical factor.

KELLER: WHAT OTHER ANNOUNCERS OVER THE YEARS HAVE YOU ADMIRED THE MOST?

SOLIE: Lance Russell, for one. Certainly Ray Morgan from years gone by. He was with Capital for a number of years.

Dennis James was once a wrestling commentator. But unfortunately he looked at it very differently that I did. He was more inclined to make fun of it, make light of it, that sort of thing. When those guys are out there, their bodies are on the line. It's not something that I think should be taken as lightly as he took it.

KELLER: WHAT CURRENT ANNOUNCERS DO YOU THINK ARE THE BEST?

SOLIE: Oh, the entire NWA crew, what else? (laughs)

KELLER: DO YOU HAVE A MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT IN WRESTLING?

SOLIE: Yeah, I think the time I got knocked out. Nick Bockwinkel was demonstrating a figure-four leglock as purely demonstration on another wrestler. He refused to relinquish it and clamped down on him real hard. (Mr.) Wrestling II came charging into the ring, and knocked down Bockwinkel. I reached out, tapped him on the shoulder, and II instinctively spun around and caught me on the chin. He didn't mean to, but it was still embarrassing to get knocked out on national television.

KELLER: ARE THERE WRESTLERS THAT YOU'VE ENJOYED INTERVIEWING THE MOST OVER THE YEARS?

SOLIE: Yeah, there are a lot of them. They are great talents, very creative in their thinking. Like I say, I've always respected them as professional athletes and I hope they respect me as a professional broadcaster. Eddie Graham was always a fantastic interview; Dusty Rhodes was really good; Ric Flair is outstanding; Lex Luger has certainly developed. It would be unfair to all of the others to pinpoint just one.

KELLER: WHO DO YOU FEEL IS THE GREATEST WRESTLER OF YOUR YEARS ANNOUNCING?

SOLIE: Well, again, you would have to look at Harley Race, Ric Flair, Jack Brisco, Lou Thesz. There have been so many greats over the years. Those are the first that come to mind.

KELLER: HAS BEING A WRESTLING ANNOUNCER EVER AFFECTED YOUR PERSONAL LIFE, IN A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE SENSE?

SOLIE: I think it's been more positive, but sure there have been negatives over the years. Obviously there is great notoriety involved with it. I enjoy being acrid about what I do. The travel aspect of it has been very good. How many people get the chance to fly to Baltimore for the weekend, or fly to Chicago, or what have you. It's a very broadening situation over the years.

KELLER: HAVE YOU EVER ANNOUNCED OVERSEAS?

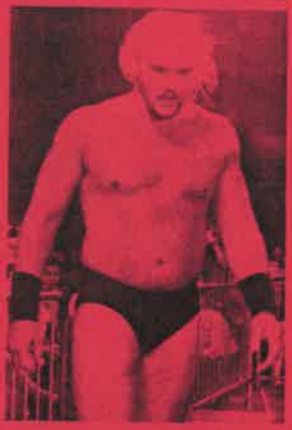
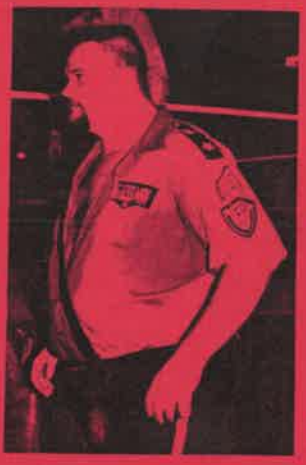
SOLIE: As a matter of fact, my shows have been overseas. I've never done any announcing overseas. I know when my son was going to the University of South Florida in Tampa an Iranian came up to him and said, "I see your last name is Solie. Do you know Gordon Solie?" Eric said, "Yes, he's my dad." And he said, "Well, I've been watching him for years. What we didn't know what somebody was pirating the Florida show and shipping it to Iran and it was being seen over there.

KELLER: ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS I DIDN'T ASK THAT YOU WISH I HAD?

SOLIE: Yeah, I wish you could tell me what the next year would bring. All I can say is I feel extremely fortunate to be able to do something for thirty years that I thoroughly enjoy. A lot of people have had a job for thirty years and hated every day of it. And, wow, what a shame they had to go through life disliking something that important.

KELLER: ANY FINAL COMMENTS?

SOLIE: Yes, I hope I'm around the next time you want to do an interview. I've enjoyed it. Thank you. ***

PHOTOS BY WADE KELLER